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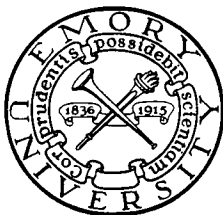
BLOW HOT BLOW COLD

A LOVE STORY.

By Augustus Mayhew



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BLOW HOT—BLOW COLD

A Love Story

BY

AUGUSTUS MAYHEW

AUTHOR OF "PAVED WITH GOLD," ETC.

Parlour Library Edition

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WARD, LOCK, AND TYLER

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London: WARD, LOCK, and TYLER, Paternoster Row.

BLOW HOT—BLOW COLD.

A Love Story.



CHAPTER I.

AN ART STUDENT.

I VERY much doubt if I am justified in publishing the following story.

The question is whether I am betraying the trust placed in me by Alfred Berthold and Rosa Maria—whether I have any right to make public other persons' family secrets. My hand would glide over the paper much more pleasantly, if I could only ease my mind of this doubt.

My sense of honour is so acute, my ideas of right and wrong are so annoyingly delicate, that I dare not for the life of me offend my conscience; for, woe is me! I had better carry a bundle of the worst fish-hooks next my bosom, than go to bed with guilt on my mind. When the candle is out, then I catch it.

But consider the facts of the case. Alfred Berthold, my hero, is one of the sweetest-hearted, gentle-minded creatures that ever trod on shoe leather. He is of so complete a disposition, that it is perfectly immaterial to me whether I offend him or not. He is the most forgiving creature in Europe, and very peaceful.

He was my most intimate friend and I loved him like a brother—ay, better than a brother, for I have quarrelled with mine. We had but one purse between us, and that I think—yes, on second thoughts I am sure—was his. If ever I wanted fifty pounds—as I have occasionally—I had but to say the word, and I never got less than a cheque for ten. I always found him generous, patient, upright, and lenient. Whatever I may publish, you may be sure will not hurt his feelings.

Then, on the other hand, my heroine, Rosa Maria, is, if anything, a more pleasant Christian than Alfred, so my revelations cannot offend her for long. A more charming, lovely, innocent creature I never met with. I adored that heavenly woman with friendship's pleasantest warmth. Though I hate walking (it puts my boots out of shape, and eventually destroys them), yet many a time have I trudged half over London to oblige her merest fancy. How frequently have I eaten at her table? Her door was never closed against me, however late I arrived for dinner. The same with supper. A lady of foreign extraction, but worthy to have been born in our own blessed land of freedom. You may be certain I shall say nothing that could injure Rosa Maria.

There are only two persons living who could possibly object to my revelations—the mother of my friend Alfred, and his infant son. The one I never liked, consequently it is perfectly immaterial to me whether she approves of my conduct or not. And besides, her eyes are too weak with age to allow her to read; and as for the boy he is so young it would

be folly to consult him in the matter—in fact, he has not yet perfectly mastered his alphabet. They are both too fragile and helpless to take any notice of, much less avenge any breach of confidence I may be guilty of.

Under these circumstances, it would be absurd to feel much delicacy in the matter. *Sapiens dominabitur astris*, and I have consulted mine and find them to be uncommonly lucky ones.

The Bertholds were what I call first-rate people, which I take it means they had more money than they well knew what to do with, and that they spent it upon things which anybody else would have considered perfectly unnecessary. They had a town-house which was unoccupied half the year, and a country seat which they lived in for about six months out of the twelve. They had carriages they seldom used, night broughams that scarcely ever left the coach-house, saddle horses that were never mounted but when the grooms exercised them. Grapes at Christmas, strawberries in February, new potatoes and green peas, pine-apples, melons, and peaches all the year round—a style of living to which I myself am partial. They kept a butler, who any day might have passed for a highly respectable clergyman. He gave me the idea that he daily read the Morning Service in the wine cellar. There was a crusty housekeeper, who considered the gift of a half-crown as a personal insult. But, worse than all, there were two giddy footmen with powdered hair and pink silk calves, who looked as pretty as china images. These fellows were my especial abhorrence, a couple of painted

monkeys, eternally skipping about you with their silver waiters like ballet dancers with their tambourines.

It took me a long time before I was at my ease at this grand establishment. A confounded gong was kept somewhere down-stairs, and whenever any household event was about to happen we were summoned together like the priests in *Norma*, by the sound of the clanging metal. We were gonged to breakfast, and gonged to lunch and dinner. Every now and then the gong went off to remind us that if we wished to wash our hands and change our boots, now or never was the time. We had to obey the powdered footman in the velvet breeches, who battered at the gong, as completely as the horse guards do their trumpeter.

Eating and dressing was the great business of the establishment. I have partaken of five most sumptuous meals, and changed my toilet three times in the day. The feasting I delighted in, but the variety of raiment was perplexing and awfully expensive. How is a fellow with only two suits of clothes to change them three times a-day? In the morning I sported my tweed suit, for the promenade I put on my frock coat and fancy pants, and for dinner I got myself up in the best way I could.

This luxurious life nearly ruined me for any other kind of work. Fancy a man who has for a month been accustomed to find a gratuitous game luncheon on the table awaiting his hunger until one o'clock, having to return to his usual business dinner of a mutton chop and kidney. Imagine the unfortunate mortal who has for four weeks grown habituated to slake his thirst with excellent claret, having to de-

scend to bitter ale and stout. How I have since longed for the sherry, and even the bottled Bass, at which, in my lucky moments, I used to turn up my pampered nose.

These details I know have nothing to do with the story about Alfred and Rosa Maria, but I mention them to show what very important people the Bertholds were. You will understand my motive when you have read a few pages.

The old lady, Alfred's mother, was a highly peculiar specimen of the offensive. She was the most terribly civil woman I ever had the pleasure of being introduced to. If we met, her mouth would immediately begin smiling to the full stretch, whilst her eyes never altered their cold expression, and you understood at once that she wasn't glad to *see* you, but only pleased to make a few courteous grimaces.

She gave me the idea that I had no business to be in her house. If it had not been for those delicious cold game luncheons, those luxurious dinners, and that more than superb claret, I could not have borne her frigid affability. Many a time, when unconsciously I have crossed her path and been met face to face with one of her aristocratic snarls, I in my nervousness have been on the point of apologizing to her for my long stay; and promising that if she would forgive me that once, I would never come again. I have seen her sitting on the sofa in her full regimentals of black satin, shining in the fire-light like a robe of patent leather. I have seen her solemnly toying with the massive gold chain that was strong enough to hold securely a rabid bull-dog; and the thought

has crossed my mind that if the judges of the land were permitted to wear fancy caps, what a first-rate Lord Chief Justice Mrs. Berthold would have made for a murder trial.

But the old Madam had one very excellent quality. She was as fond of her Alfred as a cow of its calf. She only suffered my presence in her house, because Alfred invited me. She thought me a seedy sort of fellow to be seen lolling on her damask ottoman; but I was her son's guest, and that restrained her temper. I knew it well enough. So did those confounded, powdered, velvet-legged footmen.

Here was a mother-in-law to welcome to her home the beautiful Rosa Maria. Poor little angel! there was no room for her in that black satin bosom. Blessed sufferer, she had her share of trouble to bear with. I told Alfred so from the first.

You must understand that the Madam (that was the name we christened her by) had but one constant dream, and that was her son's future. She wanted him to be Premier of England, the favourite of the Queen, and the husband of the most noble, wealthy, and lovely lady in the United Kingdom. That was all. Three times she paid his debts—and such debts! for when Alfred ran into debt, he whizzed at it with the speed of an express train over-due—a pound a minute. She told the family lawyer, who was astonished at the sum required, “He will settle down some day, and lead a quiet married life. We must look out for a rich wife to reimburse the present outlay.” I would not have been near the Madam

when first she heard about Rosa Maria—no! not for less than a sovereign.

My acquaintance with Alfred began in a most curious manner. He was mad for art; and I am an artist. But, it is a curious fact, he bought very few of my pictures. Mine was not an interested friendship. I think my "Finding the body of Harold" is in his smoking-room; and if I mistake not, my "Fruit" is somewhere about the house; but those are the only commercial transactions we have ever had together—loans excepted. I have seen him give his cheque for fifty for a few "Cocks and Hens," by Figgens, I should have been but too pleased to have rattled off for thirty shillings, and thrown a brood of chicks into the bargain. The celebrated "Hunting Morn," by Yarmouth, was his commission, and so was the well-known "Will you take it Hot, Sir?" by Pith; works really not worth talking about—unless you were trying to sell them. I only wish he had given me the chance. With the old masters he had no better luck than with the new ones. I took the trouble to introduce him personally to Ikey Dingles, with whom I do business myself to about four pounds a week; but although the grasping picture-dealer, thanks to me, got rid of his infamous "Hermit, by Georgione" (as he calls it), I was never the richer by one penny commission; so I did not profit much by my friend's love of the fine arts. No! I liked the man for his own intrinsic worth, and his generous open-handed and open-pursed disposition.

Being an artist, I naturally enough knew plenty of men following that noble, though far from remu-

nerative, profession, and it was Alfred's delight to be invited to one of our evening "meets" at my rooms, in Newman Street. We managed the expense of these soirées between us—he sending in the wine, cigars, and supper, and I providing whatever else was required. It was among us jolly fellows that he was first seized with his madness to turn artist. He was clever at a pencil sketch or a caricature, but that was all. There certainly was no gift or especial talent about him. If we had only had the pluck to open his eyes to his own demerits, what trouble he might have been saved; but we all found it very difficult to speak the simple truth to a noble-hearted prince of a man, who never came to see us without bringing a dozen of some wine or other as a present. And thus his fate was sealed.—N.B. *In vino veritas*—not true.

He mentioned his mad project of turning artist to the Madam, and she, far from checking it, at once complied with his wishes, saying that she should be delighted to see him following any occupation that would add to his accomplishments. The knowing old lady thought painting at any rate a cheaper amusement than losing at billiards. She knew that he would never have to live by his brush, and reckoned that in six months he would be tired of the smell of oil colours.

She was good enough to consult me privately on the matter. She asked me whether I considered her son had talent enough to obtain a moderate reputation as an artist. Of course, I replied that a brilliant future was awaiting him if he had perseverance enough. Was it likely I should speak the plain

downright truth to a fond, enthusiastic parent? Certainly not! When she inquired whether I thought Alfred *had* perseverance, I hinted that he was too impetuous to stick long to anything, for I knew that was what she wanted me to say. *She* didn't wish a son of hers to be an artist, you may be sure, at the beck and call of any ugly-faced monkey who wanted his portrait taken. She liked him to patronize the arts, not follow them.

The Madam also inquired what sort of people artists were. I spoke up for my friends, as every honest man should, adding that, although they might be dirty in their dress and vulgar in their habits, yet, as a class, they figured perhaps less than any other in the Government statistical returns of the crimes of the nation.

So satisfied was she with my replies that, seeing I was capitally adapted for the post, she begged of me to take her son as a pupil. The terms she offered me were so excellent that I, after a little pressing, told her that, out of affection for Alfred, I would throw up an excellent and growing connection of generous patrons, and devote myself to her son. So I gave over painting "pot-boilers" for Mr. Dingles, and cut the stingy villain. To this day I owe him seven and sixpence.

Amateurs are very extravagant fellows. It is a strange fact, that the less a man knows of his business, the more excellent he wishes his tools to be at first go off. Now, I am informed, upon excellent authority, that Bulwer's pens are the worst in the world, and Charles Dickens writes on straw-paper at two

shillings the ream. I myself saw Teddy Tyler painting his famous picture of "Whistle, and I'll come to ye, my Lad," and I know, for a fact, that nearly the whole of the background was put in with a shaving-brush, for he was very short of ready money at the time, and let his beard grow. But when my dear friend Alfred made up his mind to be an artist, he told me to buy the best of everything, and fit up his box in the most uselessly expensive manner.

He knew just about as much of painting as of house-decorating, yet he must have colours enough to have finished off a grand historical work, such as *I* am only just fit to tackle. It was not my business to object. I purchased everything at Nindsor and Wewton's, who behaved to me with their usual liberality to ready-money purchasers. I think we had six different kinds of patent easels, and two patent tents; we had a small faggot of the best brushes, and the colour-tubes were worth something merely to sell the old metal. I remember my commission came in very handily at the time, for I shouldn't have liked to lose the gold watch my dear father left me—and the time was just up.

Another curious phenomenon exhibited by rich fellows when they take to our line of art is, that England is not the right place for them to take their first drawing-lessons in. They like inspired spots, especially if they are fond of travelling. My dear Alfred talked for two hours, proving to me that, if he was to excel as a painter, he must be off to the cradle of the arts—to Rome, the hot-bed of the beautiful! to Rome, the fountain-head of excellence! As I agreed

with him in everything, I was surprised he should talk so long. I had never seen Rome, and was enchanted at the idea of visiting it at another's expense.

But, what stuff was this twaddle of his! How did he think the host of young fellows managed to get on in their profession, whose only possible glimpse of the Eternal City was through a plaster-image shop or the National Gallery? Cradle of the fine arts! Nonsense! A fellow six feet high longing to be in a cradle! And I was to be his dry-nurse, to feed and tend him until he could paint alone. I take it, we have the same effects of light and shade in London as they have in Italy; and I suppose that if a man cannot paint a little English lad well, he cannot do much better if he stares for a month at an outlandish shepherd's boy. But I did not speak in this downright manner to Alfred. The trip, if it did not improve his drawing, would his health; at any rate it would mine.

The Madam filled her son's purse; and Alfred nearly filled mine, which for obvious reasons was smaller than his. Off we started, as happy as maids at a wedding. We reached "the hot-bed of the beautiful" after a delightfully roundabout journey, which I should have enjoyed more if Alfred had not prated and rhapsodized so eternally about high art. He was never happy unless he was sharpening pencils or talking at me. Our first draught at the "fountain-head of excellence" sent us home to bed on very rickety legs; for at one of the cafés we got among a set of thirsty students, who helped to empty bowl after bowl of the punch Alfred ordered for me. The next morn-

ing I put him on his guard against being imposed upon by these student sponges.

It breaks my heart to see a generous, noble fellow set upon by a gang of positive robbers, who would drink a lake dry, if any stupid spendthrift would turn it into half-water grog. It's all very well when there are only one or two of us—then the cost is comparatively nothing; but for some twenty riotous students, with interior drinking arrangements which rival the camel's, to make *my* friend pay the score for their excessive festivals, does, I must confess, anger me. I feel as if they were taking my friend from me, and robbing me of the sweet proofs of his affection.

We had a very delightful time of it at Rome. I forget how long we stayed there; but I imagine it was upwards of one hundred pounds (I always reckon time by the money it costs. Like city men, I consider time is money; and if you keep a pocket ledger it is better than any clock). We were invited out a great deal, and were, I may say, favourites. It was nothing but three and four in the morning, and breakfasting at two in the afternoon. A gay life has its charms for me. Expensive dinner parties, cosy suppers, private concerts and balls, agree with my constitution.

The only cause I had for grumbling was Alfred's mania for flirting, and his singular whim for undertaking to make drawings for young ladies' albums. Suppose he had married, what on earth was to become of me? As for the drawings, it was I who had to do them; and, upon my word, the labour far from pleased

me. My price for a finished sketch would have been five pounds. It was inconsiderate of Alfred. It kept me at home greatly, and interfered with my studying the Italian language. Add to this my mortification, when Alfred coolly allowed himself to be praised for my work. That praise might have made my fortune; for I was over head and ears in love with a very amiable young lady, who, if not excessively beautiful had, I knew for a certainty, nearly four hundred a-year; and if my talent had met with its due appreciation, I have no doubt she would have encouraged my advances. However, let that pass. I have forgiven, and almost forgotten.

As I had expected, Alfred, whose organization is delicate, was after a time knocked up by the late hours. Then, being sick, he began to preach. He once more raved about high art. He would fly the temptations of the city, and devote himself to his newly-chosen profession. The end of it was, that I had to pack up the trunks; and we found ourselves, one evening, in the picturesque, but dirty and flea-infested little town of Soltano. The magnificent suite of apartments in Rome were exchanged for three little rooms, which, considering we were in a foreign land, and greatly looked up to, really did not agree with our station in life. I almost preferred to them my late residence in Newman Street.

An old woman, of the name of Margaritta, was our landlady, cook, and chambermaid. Her over-indulgence in garlic nearly poisoned me. I couldn't remonstrate with her, for I had lost my dictionary, and could not remember the Italian for garlic. I called t

garlicini and *garlico*, but the stupid old woman pretended not to understand me.

Alfred's disposition was what I call jerky. He was of a fits-and-starts organization. Whilst in the "hot-bed of the fine arts," his enthusiasm went quietly to sleep; but now we had reached a cooler kind of forcing-pit, his energies began to bud and sprout with unpleasant vigour. Up at six every morning; off to the hills to use up his colour-tubes and dirty the brushes. Our man, Bosco, followed us, laden with the patent tents and colour-boxes. Sometimes we passed the day, perched up like a couple of sentinels on the mountain's side, sketching the valley; or else, preferring the shelter of some chesnut grove, we passed the day under the tree-shade, staring up at the mountains. At stated hours Bosco visited us with refreshments.

The time would have passed pleasantly enough if Alfred would have left me to myself; but how can a man read or go to sleep when he is being constantly asked what colour should be used for such a distance, or which green was proper for such a vineyard? He with his colour-box, was as happy as a boy on horse-back. He had no more idea of painting than a blind puppy; but the enjoyment he derived from smearing his canvas was a gratifying phenomenon. Now, I am considered a very promising artist, yet never could I force any excessive delight from my labours, however successful they might be. Ikey Dingles ordered six copies of my "Cromwell wishing for the Crown of England." If I desire a certain effect, I can accomplish it pretty closely. But even my most pleasing

efforts never gave me one tithe the pleasure Alfred seemingly derived from his absurd smudges. How kindly has Nature blinded our eyes to our own demerits. To see him at eve carefully packing up his daubs, so nervous lest they should be rubbed, was enough to make you either die of laughing or boil with rage.

I gradually got tired of these solitary studies. I am as fond of Nature as most men, but to be staring at her all day long is vulgar, and doesn't agree with my eyesight or fancy. I considered it time I should have headaches. Accordingly, of a morning I began to feel too unwell to leave the house, and unmistakably alluded to the great benefit a week in Rome would do me; but he either did not or would not understand me.

I was actually compelled to forge a cock-and-a-bull story about a cousin of mine having arrived in the Eternal City before he would consent to my absence. I was beginning to lose the good opinion I had formerly entertained of my friend. I thought him selfish. As I said to myself, somewhat savagely (whilst shaving the next morning), I did not come to Italy to be cramped up all day long in a bothering tent, watching a fellow who didn't know a green from a gray, trying to paint a tree. I had no idea of a drawing-lesson that lasted from six a.m. to seven p.m. My terms for such a course of instruction would have been at the rate of seven guineas a-day, and paid quarterly in advance.

But, oh! how sincerely did I afterwards repent that I allowed my personal inconvenience to wrestle

and overthrow my friendship for Alfred. It seemed as if I was the guardian angel of that accomplished and prosperous gentleman. The moment my back was turned, temptation, sorrow, and care took advantage of my absence to lay violent hands upon his happiness. Unlucky day when I packed up four shirts and started forth to enjoy myself.

The story that follows I had from Alfred's lips—and a very affecting narrative it is. He told it to me in his own open-hearted manner, confiding to me—a comparative stranger—incidents which, had I been in his place, I should have preferred keeping very secret. You will, perhaps, agree with me that when your mother-in-law is an illegal wretch, and the rest of your wife's family a pack of scoundrels, the closer you keep your mouth closed the better. But secrecy did not agree with Alfred's nature. He must speak out. He did so; and this is the substance of what he told me.

It would seem my departure did not in any way check his mad propensity for out-of-door sketching. He had no objection to the solitude. He liked to perch himself up in some mountain nook, and, stuck up like a crow on a steeple, fire away at the fifteen miles of lovely scenery stretched out at his feet. He became especially partial to greasy, sheep-skinned labourers going to or returning from their work. The dirtier and more tattered they were the better he liked them. Women carrying baskets on their heads affected him deeply, especially if they were in garments of many colours. He babbled of the picturesque. Even when the weather kept him at home

he could not allow himself a little rest, but would work at the open window, knocking off the village church or rattling in the cottages over the way. Such zeal, had it been backed by a little talent, ought to have made an artist out of a trunk-maker; and decidedly Alfred began to know a red when he saw it. One of the paintings he made about this time, I a few days since (being short) sold to Ikey Dingles for one-pound-three. It had about forty shillings' worth of hard, solid colour on it.

One day he had been fortunate enough to discover a remarkably convenient spot up the mountain's side, where, seated on a moderately hard rock, he could distinctly behold some thirty villages. To work he went, squeezing the panorama into two square feet of canvas. Late in the afternoon he was still tackling the ninth village. So silent and absorbed had he been in his labour, that the lizards crept out of their holes and took their sun-bath close to his boots. The birds, too, felt no more reverence for him than for an ancient scarecrow.

The sun was slowly journeying towards Jamaica—famous for pine-apple rum—when some difficulty in the perspective bothered him, and, for the first time that day, he felt that his back ached. He drew himself up to stretch. Away darted the lizards, away flew the birds—but not so two young girls, who never budged an inch, but continued to stare at him as if he were a wax-work show.

In a moment Alfred's back ceased to ache, for one of these girls had a face that operated like chloroform. The brush dropped from his hand and rolled off in the

direction of Florence. He could not help saying half aloud, "What a beautiful creature!" What else he might have felt inclined to say there is no telling, for he was an amiable lad and not proud, but his pretty speeches were checked by one of the girls opening the conversation with this warning:—"Night is near, when it is dangerous for strangers to remain so far from home."

Her voice, he told me, was exquisitely soft and tender in its tones. He did not know to what he could compare it. I suggested the "musical glasses," but they did not suit his fastidious fancy. He also dilated on the melancholy, half-pathetic expression of the beauty's face as she addressed him. I hinted that, perhaps, she was poor and half-starved; but his reply was so insulting I shall not condescend to print it.

As is always the case, just as he was preparing to jump up and advance towards the ladies, they saved him the trouble by walking away. The beauty, seizing her friend's arm, hurried her off at a smart pace. She looked back once, and, seeing him clambering down the sides of the rock in evident pursuit, clasped her hands together, as if entreating him not to follow them.

Luckily for the girl's sake he obeyed her, for in less than a second a big broad-shouldered fellow sauntered round the corner, who from his manner of addressing them, was evidently a familiar, and had come out expressly to meet them. The only consolation left to poor Alfred was to sit down again on his hard rock, and watch the trio with straining eyes until they disappeared among the trees that encircled the little

town of Nieti. A poor consolation, to be sure, especially as he was rather uneasy about the broad-shouldered fellow, and longed for a few particulars concerning his right to walk, talk, and laugh with the lovely maiden. Concerning the other and plainer damsel he did not bother himself.

There was one portion of Alfred's story which I never for a moment doubted. I knew that if he termed a girl "lovely," she must be something worth three cheers, and no heel taps. He had excellent taste, and a quick appreciation of a well-arranged countenance.

Sometimes he has stopped me in the London streets to make me admire the dark blue eye of some ragged, dirty Irish boy I rather objected to look at. A face which I should term ugly, he would discover to be graced by a pretty upper lip. He would ferret out a beauty, whether it was hidden under unwashed skin, or shadowed by some overwhelming deformity. In female beauty he was very deeply instructed. Look at his opportunities! Is it to be wondered at?

When the Madam gave an evening party, her rooms would be crowded with pretty women, enough to make a yesterday's bridegroom feel inconstant—highly-bred, finely-featured, large-eyed beauties, with little feet, little hands, and swelling bosoms, with any of whom I was ready to fall in love at an encouraging glance of the eye—golden-haired blondes, with peachy skins—smooth and blooming brunettes, with raven locks and dagger eyes—mediums, with heads of every tint, from nut brown to delicate ginger; all—yes, all of them perfect in their way, and shortening the breath when looked upon.

We had, too, in Italy seen a vast quantity of pretty faces—the classical, the eccentric, and the pathetic. So when Alfred declared his peasant girl to be the most beautiful woman he had ever beheld, I fully believed him. He was not given to romance. He had gone through his course of love-letters and flirtations—had been twenty times on the point of “asking mamma,” so that you may consider that the fine edge of his sentiment had been worn down, and he had settled into tough criticism.

It would seem that this beauty of his was blessed with an attraction very valuable in Italy—golden hair; not the pale six-carat gold; the pale guinea Albert chain stuff; but the warm red gold, such as Arabs and Jews prefer. Eyes so full of blue, they seemed overflowing with tenderness; and where the sleeve had protected the arm from the burning sun, a delicate white skin, transparent, if my memory does not deceive me, as isinglass, through which the blue veins were, even at a considerable distance, distinctly seen. That is, as closely as I can remember, the description he gave me of this adored stranger.

How could a man devote himself to his profession when all his thoughts were absorbed by the village maid? If he tried to outline a tree, a house, or a horse, the pencil would rebel, and, somehow or other, wander into the form of a young girl.

Every day he was off at sunrise to his seat in the rocks, not to draw or paint, but to stare in the direction of Nieti, and dream until the dew began to fall. Then back to old Margaritta, to the dinner he did not want, and to be scolded for keeping it wait-

ing. He was an industrious apprentice thoroughly spoiled.

The man who, for ten hours at a stretch, could sit with his nose over-hanging his sketch-book; who, when the thunder growled, paid no more attention to it than the rumbling of cart-wheels, who never raised his head but to choose a colour or examine the landscape; this man—my friend Alfred—was now as inattentive as a charity-boy at church, and would pass hours rubbing the point off his pencil. His eyes and ears were working now, and his hand resting. When a branch rustled, his head turned round to the sound as quick as a cowl in a hurricane. A bird hopping among the dry leaves would make him spring to his legs like a watch-dog, and stare about him.

He was an impulsive fellow, and could not suffer quietly, or do anything by halves. Either he must be calmly indifferent or madly excited. His saucer head was now on the brisk boil, and full of vapours. A brown petticoat creeping along the distant road would send him into paroxysms of hope and fear; a red corset miles away would affect him worse than proof spirit. For three days he endured this torture. The only relief he could find to his sufferings was in blowing up the unfortunate Bosco, who, wretched man, was thus made to suffer from love as much as his master.

When his patience was exhausted with waiting for his adored to come to him, he determined on altering his tactics and setting out to search for her. He began his hunt at Nieti. He stared up at all the houses, peeped into all the windows, and looked in at

every open door. He tried a thousand ingenious artifices for worming out the secret of his beloved's residence from the old women spinning at their doors. He entered houses on cunning pretences, buying fruit, or anything he didn't want, in the vain hope that his adored might show herself. The result only convinced him that he was wasting his time, and he came to the conclusion that Nieti was the dirtiest village in the world, and he only soiling his boots in its filthy lanes, side alleys, and pathways.

When a man has been foiled in the dearest wish of his heart, there are only two methods left of consoling himself. The first is the simple and efficacious one of killing himself; or, if he be a philosopher, he may have recourse to the second, and proceed to convince himself, against his will, that the object of his trials is not worthy of such anxiety, and that he must have been mad to worry himself with such folly.

Alfred applied the remedy No. 2 to his bruised heart. He laughed at himself. On my return (for more clean shirts and a little money), I found him in this excellent state of mind. He, of course, sought my advice under the circumstances. That advice, seeing which way his own fancy blew, I took good care should be to his taste.

To his observation, that "Perhaps it was better to give her up," I answered, in a cheerful voice, "I should think so, old boy! If you found her out what good would it do you? You might paint her portrait, and making love would improve your Italian; but I prefer models by the hour, and instruction by the lesson."

"Yes, I *will* give her up," he cried, with tremen-

dous emphasis, which, considering he had tried his utmost to find her, and had failed, was very self-sacrificing on his part.

"Let the poor little girl alone," I continued. "She is happy enough selling her fruit and bartering over her pennyworths of apples. Let her marry the broad-shouldered fellow, and cook his macaroni."

That was hard upon him, and he winced. I am very fond of being cruel out of kindness. "I don't suppose you would harm the girl?" I added, as if such a thing were impossible.

"Harm her! Not I, the pretty child!" he answered, sharply.

It is wonderful to notice how noble are the first sentiments of these gallant swains, how indignantly they repel any doubts of their disinterestedness and purity.

"You wouldn't like to hear," I said, "that the broad-shouldered lover had beaten her, or her parents turned her out of doors?"

On this his virtue and nobility rose up and hissed at me very snakishly. He informed me that his only object in searching after the girl had been the harmless one of seeing her pretty face. Men travelled miles, and crossed seas, to look at a magnificent view; but if any one walked a few paces from his path to gaze on a beautiful face, his motives were instantly suspected. Hers was the most lovely countenance he had ever seen. Wasn't it natural he should wish to look on it again? He considered human beauty the perfection of all beauty. Let others stare at mountains and waterfalls, but he could see more poetry and

sublimity in the perfect human face, where the beauty of faultless features were rendered almost holy by the expression of gentleness and innocence. The same feelings which rushed into his heart as he stood before a Virgin by Raphael, he felt with double force as he gazed upon this other virgin by God. Who would dare to blame him for loving the painted image? Then, why should his modest and honest admiration of the living one be disgraced by base imputations?

I was sadly in want of cash, and he was angry, or I might have argued this point with him. A man in temptation is never in such danger of doing evil as when he can persuade himself that he means none. The moment such inward discussions are necessary be sure it is only the cunning of the brain endeavouring to conceal the evil of the heart.

"Bravely spoken, and like a true artist," I cried; "but still I insist upon it, you had better forget the girl, and come to Rome with me."

"Why had I better?" asked the simpleton.

"Because, my dear fellow!" I answered, "because, in your condition, you are not to be trusted by yourself. Suppose you and this girl do meet: as long as you only look at her, well and good. You may worship and reverence the heavenly masterpiece; but her innocent tongue will in time prattle and drag you down to earth. She will talk of such mundane things as grapes three pounds for twopence, or how many eggs her chickens lay. If she would preach you a sermon, or sing you hymns, then I'd trust you, for you might continue to think her divine; but her trade gossip will bring you back from the clouds, and restore

all your humanity—and if you do not end in making love to the poor thing, I'm a hottentot."

"Upon my honour, I would not harm her!"

"Nobly said," I continued, "and I like you for saying it. Then what is the use of falling in love with the pretty child? You can't marry her you know. We should have the Madam jumping off Waterloo Bridge, if you took such a daughter-in-law home. What good could come to the little thing, unless you gave your washing to her relations, or traded with them for eggs?" I laughed, hoping he might be infected and laugh too. But mine was not a hearty laugh, but a crimped, forced grin; and he rose up very savage and bitter.

"Let the conversation drop," he muttered; "I tell you I have done with the girl."

"That's pluckily given," I cried, with a slight tone of admiration in my voice, as if aware of the greatness of the sacrifice. "No doubt the little thing is very beautiful; but, honestly, is she better than hundreds of others you have left behind in England? Just compare them. Can your enchantress rattle away at the piano? Do you think you would care to ask her opinion about a book or a picture? Can she read and write? Just cast your eye over the girls we have seen at the Madam's parties. Do you remember the one in the white satin boots with the blue heels? the one who gave you the camellia? There was the one, too, who caught her ringlets in your coat-button whilst waltzing; with whom you rode out on horseback the next day. She was lovely, if you like. You would have no difficulty in finding them out, and the Madam would help you."

He was looking out of the window, and without turning his head, answered, "I tell you this Italian girl is the most beautiful creature I have ever beheld." The voice was full of pepper—Cayenne—and a caution against trifling. I took another tack.

"But you have forgotten a rather important point, old boy: because you adore this poor infant, you imagine she loves you. That's a way you spoiled children have: you fancy your strong will is the only one to be answered. If it should turn out that she prefers the garlic-eating, broad-shouldered fellow to the elegant Alfred Berthold! Don't you see you are planting your corn before the ground is ploughed. I call it a waste of valuable sentiment, which you'd find very useful when you are older. You'll blister your tender heart at this rough country-work, and when we return to London you'll be as tough as a rheumatic misanthrope. Come to Rome with me and have a decent bottle of wine!"

I suspected him the moment he said, "No, I shall stay here and finish my picture: it is for the Madam. You can go. Send me a few tubes of white, will you?"

"You'll promise me not to bother your head any more about this elegant rustic?"

"Not I." (Poor fellow; he was humbugging himself, not me.) "I shall scrape my palette, wash my brushes, and to work, sir! to work!"

"Honour bright?"

"I really don't think I'd cross this room to see her."

That was a little too strong.

"Nobly said!"

"It's gone by now. Perhaps I've been making a fool of myself; that's all."

"Better come to Rome."

"So I will, directly the valley is finished. I want to send it home. Confound the little blue-eyed minx! Don't think I'm staying for her. That's past and gone."

Do not for one moment fancy I believed him.

"Sure?"

"Yes, I should think so—as sure as that I am smoking this cigar." He puffed at the Havannah, but it had gone out. That looked like a bad omen.

The same thought crossed his mind, for he threw the weed away and added, "As sure as I shall drink this wine." That seemed to be a tolerably safe undertaking, for he raised the glass steadily, and opened his mouth wide enough to take in a pint; when somehow or other, his fingers slipped, and a smash and a slop were the consequences.

Destiny! destiny! there is no escaping that party.

CHAPTER II.

THE WORST OF BEING HUMAN.

Now I give you my honest word as a gentleman that I never for one moment believed a single word of all my dear Alfred's solemn vows. I must do him the justice to say I considered he was deceiving himself, not trying to humbug me. I concluded that, the moment my back was turned, he would be hunt-

ing after the girl again. However, I had done my duty, and never, as I reviewed my conduct, did my mind feel in such superlative ease, although seated in the uncomfortable bumping vehicle which took me back to Rome.

Ah! if you wish to feel happy, always do your duty bravely, and preach at the follies of men without mercy. It persuades you that your own virtues are superior to the general allotment, and comforts any alarms you may entertain about past misconduct. But be careful, when you do preach, to address your remarks only to strangers. Spare your friends, unless you wish to get rid of them.

Viewing our relative positions, I consider my conscience nearly got me into a scrape. I prated beyond my usual prudence. Young men of fortune prefer being envied and called lucky dogs. They like to be encouraged in their schemes. But I never could do it. These idiotic ravings about the curl of a ringlet or the glance of an eye are not to my fancy. I call it perverted taste. Inward worth is another matter. There I will go any length with you, only it's so scarce I didn't feel alarmed about losing a pupil on that score.

But to return to my argument—experience tells us (or at all events tells *me*) that rich men do not like being preached at by their drawing-masters. This thought, I will confess, embittered the first bottle of wine I ordered at my Roman hotel. There is nothing so delicious or so dangerous as giving advice. It is a luxury which no prudent man should indulge in, unless he is a clergyman, a barrister, or a master. I ac-

quired the bad habit through keeping a servant—a very nice little boy of twelve, whose widowed mother was the worst washerwoman I ever employed. This lad came to me for two hours daily, and ran errands or did odd jobs, such as buying my coals or fetching refreshments.

This boy would come to me with dirty hands and rough hair, and in a most offensive condition of abject want. I gave him short sermons (for I couldn't spare much time out of his two hours) on all these failings. He ought to have turned out a Socrates in humble life, and perhaps he did ; but he nearly caused my ruin, for I grew so fond of moralizing on the absurd general behaviour of the world—and especially of my errand-boy—that it is a mercy my life was spared. Everybody turned against the preacher. Writs were threatened, short standing bills were sent in. I had to fly.

To cure myself, I managed to get involved in bill transactions, which forced me into close communion with a very spiteful Jew attorney, who had hit upon the clever idea of moralizing with you for an hour, and afterwards charging you for listening to the abuse ; but to whom I never dared open my mouth, except to thank him for his absurd lecture, and beg for mercy. I thought this had cured me. But, as you have read, my tongue is of mettle too high to be perfectly subdued ; and, in an evil moment, galloped away with my common sense. I had, like a low maniac, presumed to dictate to a gentleman whose ten-pound notes were of vital importance to my happiness.

I pondered over my folly, and stood aghast at the risk I had run. Confound the peasant girl; what business was it of mine, if Alfred chose to love twenty ladies' schools, or even sigh for that army of purity, the ten thousand virgins of Cologne. I could have twisted the neck of my idiotic morality, for cackling between my lucrative appointment and a freak of my patron.

To set matters at rest again, I wrote Alfred a few lines—a few witty pleasant lines, well expressed and chatty—inquiring if he had met his fair one, and joking playfully about love-making to this Venus in a village. I asked him to hurry over his vows of constancy, and come to me, for Rome was very lively. I informed him that when he was tired of his present pretty face, there were plenty more about Italy to raise his drooping heart. That was my style of letter. I laughed over it very heartily when finished.

He did not, though.

He had a fit of rage, which, if I had been as quick at taking offence as he at giving it, would have cost me four hundred of the Madam's sovereigns, paid annually. By Jove, gentlemen, experience tells me the most dangerous thing next to lecturing a useful friend, is to joke with him. Be a solid, stolid lump, and keep your virtue and puns to yourself. Then you are as safe as a government pensioner.

The fact was, I understood about as much of Alfred's character as I did of the lace-making machine or Chinese carving. I am a capital hand at telling the winning horse when the race is run, but there my genius begins and stops. Guess-work is out of my

line altogether, and gets me into messes that require a great deal of rescue. This very letter, so playful and friendly, so happily intended to cement a life's friendship, was very nearly the cause of my buying a railway time table, and rushing in disgust back to London, and that demon at a bargain, Ikey Dingles.

I received, my dear readers, by the next day's post, a letter which, in the very first line, contained three direct insults. The remainder of it was filled with insinuations which, a very few years since, would have called for blood; but, civilized as we now are, only roused my disgust.

He wished me to understand he "might be an enthusiast, but decidedly no villain;" he modestly asserted "he was endowed with too high a nobility of soul to pollute the shrine at which he worshipped." I had been base enough to imagine that he "belonged to the lukewarm pedlars of the world, who one day knelt in the temple, and on the morrow sold their wares within its sacred precincts." I don't know what I had done, but for the future "I was not to confound him with the vulgar herd whose admiration meant envy and destruction—who knocked the arms off statues as memorials; but to bear in mind that he felt deep gratitude towards all things beautiful, and prayed for their preservation," etc. etc.

I folded up this letter, labelled it, and put it away carefully. Some day, I thought, that letter will be my shield. Had I dared, I would have sent it on to the Madam to warn her of her son's danger; but my limited resources persuaded me I had better trust

to providence. Catch me trusting to providence again!

However, I now thoroughly understood the individual I had to deal with. There was no chance of any more mistakes. I had confounded him with other young fellows who think no more of stuffing a poor believing girl's head with a quantity of love nonsense than I do of packing a carpet bag. My dear friend was a little pot and soon hot. He boiled up briskly under the fire of a pretty eye, but, unlike most fellows who have more money than they can spend, he never exceeded the moral degrees.

Now I knew my man, there was no chance of our again falling out. For the future, my dear friend might rush headlong into any destruction he had a fancy to, and as long as it pleased him, I wouldn't grumble.

It would seem that after my departure, Alfred felt wretched and uncertain how to act. My allusions to the Madam had frightened him, and checked his ardour for the village flirtation. He found himself thinking a great deal too solemnly and too enthusiastically about this Italian girl. He felt he was in a dangerous state, and was angry with me for giving him the first warning. My method of crying "Fire!" had been too loud and sudden. I had found him out. My philosophical sand-bag had stopped his raging cannon-ball, and turned it to harmless heavy iron. He went to bed in an indescribable state of mind, in which my ruin and misery was somehow mixed up with a wish that this girl should enter a convent, and the broad-shouldered fellow have a fit and die in torments. No

doubt he kicked the sheets and had unpleasant dreams.

Love is, to my fancy, a kind of drunkenness, and all the world knows that the finest remedy for a hot brain is a strong dose of remorse next morning. How often have I seen old Tom Tate taking this medicine. He had been the loudest and jolliest wag overnight; he had flourished his tumbler of grog as he sang songs about ruby wine; he never took less than six parting glasses before he could get his hat on his head and stagger home. Next day, when I caught him rising at mid-day, how he would abuse himself as he brushed the matted hair from his clammy forehead; how he would curse those last tumblers, and hunt in his pocket for "that change." Oh! it was the finest nonsense imaginable to listen to his vows of reformation.

The same with my Alfred. He had his next morning. He rose very tired and depressed, and felt he had allowed his passions to get into his head and upset him. He hunted in his heart for the silver love, and discovered only a coppery admiration. It seemed to him that everything and everybody was opposed to his ever meeting this girl again. She was keeping out of his way, evidently on purpose. I had called him to task, and laughed at him to his face. It was a foolish business, and he would end it. As soon as the view of the thirty villages was finished, he would start for Naples, and take a portrait of Mount Vesuvius.

He stayed at home all day, because he had promised me not to seek the girl; and sorry as he was to have pledged his word, he would not break it. To

enable him to forget her for ever, he sketched her in twenty different positions. At dinner-time he quarrelled with old Margaritta, declaring the table-cloth was black, and accusing her of keeping it up the chimney, although the poor soul swore by forty-nine saints it was clean a day ago. He made old Bosco jump about like a kid, so lustily did he howl out his commands. The wine was bad, the dinner infamous, and the attendance diabolical.

To soothe his excitement he took up Chaucer, and tried what effect poetry would have upon him; but though he stared at the book till bed-time, he never got beyond six lines, so perseveringly did his busy brain put out his eyes. His reading was something after this style—describing it in the dramatic style:—

Alfred (reading). “For God it wot, men may full often find—A Lordès son do shame and villany.” (*To himself, biting his lips and still staring at the book*)—I am not a Lordès son, but I would not do villany. I wouldn’t hurt that sweet girl, for instance. But I should like enormously to put her to school, or lock her up in a convent, and so do her good. She is too pretty to be at liberty, and safe. (*Reading*)—“For God it wot, men may full often find”—(*talking as before*)—Yes, but God it wot, I wouldn’t harm a golden hair of her beautiful head. Plenty would jump at the chance, though. Some fellows I know would come from England on purpose—(*reading*)—“For God it wot”—(*speaking*)—Tom Oxendon would, if he could borrow the money; so would Ned Panton. They had better keep away whilst I am here—(*reading*)—“For God it wot, men full often find—A

Lordès son—(*speaking*) Ah, half the blue book. Poor girl, they would dazzle her with their high-flown deceit. Why doesn't she go into a convent? It's a custom of the country. I shall be better when I am miles away. The temptation is so very unsurmountable. As soon as that drawing of mine is finished, etc. etc.

After this fashion he read but six lines, and muttered sixty volumes.

He reckoned it would take him three days to finish his picture, and he made the following agreement with himself:—He would return to his old perch on the mountain's side, and if the girl came, he would, of course, speak to her, but—mark you—only as a brother. If she kept away, well and good—he should never see her again, that was all.

These preliminaries being settled, to work he went at the thirty villages. It was difficult, he found, to attend to his painting on the first day, and there was a deal of whistling and singing, not, he assured me, to attract the notice of any passer-by, and tell her he was waiting to see her, but merely as an amusement, he being fond of music in any form. The church in the nineteenth village bothered him, and made him half decide upon a stroll to Nieti to get—he told me—a closer view of it, but not because his beauty lived there.

But he resisted these absurd pretexts, and gradually his courage returned. A happy touch or two reconciled him to his art, and as the evening drew in, he wondered what the old woman would give him for dinner—a certain sign he was outgrowing his love fit.

The next day was very trying, but it passed without accident. He joked Bosco when that overpaid fellow brought the lunch, and whilst eating it made friends with a boy hunting after a stray goat. Certainly he asked a great many questions about Nieti and its female inhabitants; but he was calm and careful in his cross-examinings, and seemed perfectly cured.

But in the book of fate there was an especial line relating to me, stating in positive terms that I was never to visit Naples. The place of all others I longed to visit; the blue water, they say, nobody can paint, the finest ices manufactured were denied me, because a young woman's petticoat stopped the way. I know I could have painted that water, and made my fortune; I feel I could. That chance of immortality was snatched from me. Ices I am particularly fond of, and since—thanks to free trade—the noble introduction of the pen'orths in a wine-glass, many a time have I eaten them until my chest felt as cold as the tip of a Laplander's nose.

To show how near my dear Alfred (you see I forgive him) escaped his bad fortune, I will mention that his head had for six hours hung, quiet as a bough, over his artistic smudge. He had carefully dotted in the last window of the last village, and was quietly thinking upon the safest method of forwarding the gem to England, when the same voice—the one I attempted to compare to musical glasses—once more uttered a warning. "It is late, Signor, for strangers to be seen among the mountains!"

It was all over! Much valuable time had been

wasted, that was all ! Those tones so exquisitely soft and tender, went all over him as if a flash of sheet lightning had exploded in his bosom.

Confound the thirty villages, up he jumped, and to the ground fell the masterpiece, with, of course, the sticky side downwards. In another second twenty miles of romantic scenery were covered with dead leaves, and my dear friend had, quick as a trap, seized hold of the arm of a young woman.

He was rather crestfallen to find that in his hurry he had pounced upon, not his golden beauty, but a little sunburnt, giggling minx, who never fluttered a feather, but seemed highly delighted with her perilous position. Still she was a hostage, and he kept his hold. He reckoned the beauty would never be so mean as to fly and leave the giggler in the lurch.

Speaking the best Italian he could (and highly curious stuff it was), Alfred made the young ladies understand that it was also very late for two such pretty faces to be wandering about without any one to protect them. The absurdity of the remark set the sunburnt girl laughing, as if some one was tickling her, and she answered pertly, "To protect us ! Do you hear that, Rosa Maria ? Who do you think, Signor, would hurt us ? We are as safe as the stones in the road, for we are not worth the taking."

Alfred, instead of replying, was busy entering the name of Rosa Maria in his memory ; so the brown one added, " Besides, you are far from your home, but we shall reach ours in ten minutes."

" But I shall not part with you for hours," answered Alfred, trying to look amiable.

"Oh! but you must," continued Miss. "Let me go, Signor!" She looked so much like "keep me tight," the Signor persisted in his hold.

"Make me a promise, and I will release you," stipulated Alfred.

"Help me, Rosa!" cried the captive. Nothing would have pleased my amorous artist better than if the beauty had rushed to the rescue; but she stood perfectly still, her large sad eyes staring their hardest. For decency's sake, the brown girl struggled slightly.

"You run away so fast, I am afraid to lose you," continued Alfred. "Give me your promise to stay here twenty minutes, and you shall be free. Will you?"

"Twenty minutes!" answered the brown minx, looking towards Rosa Maria. "They'll think we are lost in the mountains, won't they, Rosa?"

The beautiful Rosa, at whom Alfred was firing volley after volley of imploring looks, was either moved to pity by compassion for her friend, or the tyrant's imploring eyes, for she answered in a quiet tone, "I will remain here for a short time if it is necessary."

When the sunburnt minx was released, instead of flying, she stood her ground bravely, as if there was nothing to fear. "Since we are to stay," she said, "you must show us the drawings we have seen you working at so often."

Rather flattered at the request, Alfred picked up his famous picture, but the leaves had stuck to the oil colours tight as those that surround the Spanish liquorice of commerce. He tried to peel one off, but

it brought an entire village away with it. The brown girl laughed, and he was too happy to think of the Madam, so he laughed too. That venerable dame would have rustled her black satin with indignation if she could have seen her son joking with two peasants over the ruin of her beautiful present, and the brown minx would have had a mighty slap on her plump back to stop her giggling.

When my dear friend had taken the edge off his mirth, he said, in an injured tone, "See what you have made me do—look at my unfortunate picture! It has taken me a week to paint." To his great joy, Rosa Maria seemed quite pained at the sad calamity.

He was, of course, enraptured with her pity. "Never mind," he generously exclaimed, "I have some other sketches you shall see; but, before I open the exhibition—you must pay for peeping—I must know where you live."

He looked at the beauty, but the minx being lively and fond of talking, insisted upon answering. "Where we live, indeed! You are determined to drive hard bargains. First let us see if your drawings are worth our secret."

In my opinion they were not, but the young lady was greedy for a long flirtation. But Rosa Maria, like a good girl, disapproved of such conduct. "Annitta," she said, "you may trust the Signor if he will promise us not to remain so late at night among the mountains."

"Always the same warning," thought Alfred. "What can the pretty child be hinting at?" She spoke with such evident anxiety, he could not help

attaching some importance to the caution. He looked at Annitta for an explanation.

"Rosa Maria means," said that maiden, "that you must always return to Soltano before sunset. Do you understand?"

Staring at the beauty, he asked Annitta, "How does Rosa Maria know I live at Soltano?" On which the golden-haired culprit blushed and confessed—"I have seen you there; you live at the house of old Margaritta. I have noticed you when I have been to our priest to confess. The church is nearly opposite your window."

My dear friend, who is staunch Church of England, wondered to himself what on earth could be the necessity of such an innocent creature confessing her pretty little sins. Looking cunning, he said, "So you have been peeping, have you, pretty Rosa? Do you live at Soltano?"

Although the question was addressed to her friend, the sun-burnt Annitta was obliging enough to volunteer the answer. "At Soltano! Indeed, we live at Nieti, but we go to your town because milk and fruit fetch better prices."

Alfred's great object in prolonging this examination was to create a kind of friendship between himself and the beautiful Rosa. He had not as yet dared stir a foot, for fear she should be frightened away. But since she, of her own accord, joined in the conversation, he, moving very slowly, crept to her side.

Her pale face was looking full into his as he took her hand. "Where do you hide yourself in Nieti?" he asked. "I have hunted for you all through the

town; I am sure I did not miss one house. You must have seen me coming, and concealed yourself."

Her answer was a mournful shake of her round little head. Dropping his voice, he added, "But now we have met, and are such good friends, we shall often see each other again—every day at least, eh, Rosa Maria? Say 'yes;' it is as short as 'no,' and will make me very happy."

Her face of seventeen looked as solemn as one of seventy, as she innocently replied, "I am not my own mistress; I have to obey what others order me to do."

"Surely, you are not married?"

Up came the blushes. "No! but my mother often requires me at home." At this moment Annitta, who had been busy examining Alfred's sketch-book, uttered a cry of surprise that put an end to this sentimental conversation, and prevented my friend from noticing the evident sorrow with which Rosa spoke of her mother. You will presently learn why she was so sorrowful.

"Come here, Rosa!" cried the forward brown girl. "Look! here is Nieti, with the trees and the old church! You can see the boats on the lake, and your mother's garden. And here is Monteluna, and over so many places."

Being, as I have before remarked, but an indifferent artist, Alfred was delighted at this praise. "Those views," he conceitedly observed to Rosa Maria, "were taken from the hills above Terrafuoco. Do you know that part of the country?"

Instead of answering him his question, she cried

out in alarm, "You must never venture there. Promise me you will keep away!"

Putting on a look of excessive gallantry, he replied, "In future I shall never leave this spot. I prefer it since there is a chance of meeting you."

"But this place is as bad as any other," continued the pretty child.

"All the country seems dangerous, according to Rosa Maria," said Alfred, laughing. "Why am I to give up my strolls in the mountains?"

As Rosa Maria hesitated to reply, her friend did. "Haven't you heard of the brigands? Rosa thinks, talks, and dreams of nothing else but these horrid wretches. She is mad about them."

Looking sublimely brave, Alfred laughed out, "Never mind the brigands, pretty Rosa! Whenever they choose to come for me, I have a pair of pistols will teach them good manners."

"But they come in a band—ten, twenty of them," cried the girl, becoming more and more agitated. "Of what use would your pistols be then? Think of that. Ask Annitta if they are not desperate men; tell him, Annitta, if three dead bodies have not been found within this week on those very hills of Terrafuoco. For your own sake, Signor, believe me! Speak to him, Annitta; he may put faith in you! Tell him of the young French signor who was seized and ——." What became of this unfortunate gentleman was left to Alfred's imagination, for Rosa Maria, overpowered by her emotion, was unable to finish her story.

But if she couldn't speak, her friend was in excellent voice. "It is true, Signor, that no one is safe

from home after nightfall. There are several bands of these brigands, and it is no use sending any troops against them, for the soldiers are killed, and the robbers remain as bold and numerous as before."

Despite his pistols, Alfred began to feel alarmed. "It is a warning, Signor," cried Rosa. "Not only the mountains but the villages are full of these wicked people. I came here to save you. You are watched. Already it is known that you remain until late in the mountains. You must promise us always to return home as soon as the labourers leave the fields. It is to save your life we came to you."

At first Alfred, who was now as serious as a parish clerk, was mean enough to wonder whether these girls were sent to entrap him; but one glance at Rosa Maria restored his belief in their innocence.

The poor girl's face was looking beseechingly up to his, and her hands were clasped in entreaty. For fear he might be suspected of cowardice, he hesitated for a short time to give the desired promise. But he had, trust me, no greater love of danger than most people, and soon made up his mind to act upon the girl's advice. The maid with the golden hair had to sigh thrice and stare at him with her sad blue eyes before Alfred positively gave his word that he would not allow himself to be murdered if he could help it.

The twenty minutes bargained for by Alfred had by this time expired, and whilst he held Rosa Maria by the hand to say farewell, he hinted that on the morrow he was disengaged and would be anxiously awaiting the pair of them at any place they would mention. But great difficulties seemed to

oppose this second meeting. He had to threaten a daily visit to Nieti and a nocturnal ramble upon the most dangerous mountains before Annitta, who had obligingly taken upon herself the task of making the necessary arrangements, would consent to an appointment. As they left him Annitta, imagining that he might attempt to accompany them called out, "Do not follow us, Signor; for if you are seen, they will beat poor Rosa Maria."

My dear friend fell back with marvellous rapidity as he heard this. The idea of anybody having the brutal courage to strike so innocent and lovely a being made him shudder with indignation, and double up his fists as if ready to defend her. Poor beauty! She had no home then! No wonder her face was so sad, and her voice so tremulous. Beaten! He determined to sift the matter, and save the unfortunate child if he could from such humiliation for the future.

This last discovery had the effect of doubling the love he already felt towards the golden-haired maiden. He fancied he had a mission to perform, and made up his mind to stay at Soltano until it was successfully accomplished.

Early the next day old dame Margaritta was summoned from her kitchen, to attend upon her Signor in the state rooms. So unusual a circumstance frightened the poor soul into a trembling fit, for she made sure there was to be another scene about another table-cloth. But the Signor received her with excessive grace, and with his own hand poured out wine for her to drink. He made tender inquiries about her health and Bosco's behaviour. The old lady

was overcome by these unusual civilities, and was soon chatting and letting out the secrets of the village as fast as her tongue could wag. Presently Alfred inquired about the little girl, "whose name he was told was Rosa Maria."

"A good girl, a good girl! pious and gentle," cried the old woman. "She brings me milk and fruit. The grapes your Excellency had for breakfast but yesterday were from Rosa's basket."

Alfred remembered he had not tasted even one of them, and deeply regretted the omission. "She seems very sorrowful and suffering," he said, "I saw her from my window. Is she so very poor?"

"The blessed infant, and well she may look sorrowful," answered Margaritta, indignantly. "If some people had justice, they would lie in prison of nights instead of in their beds."

In alarm Alfred asked Margaritta if she referred to Rosa, and if so, of what crime the girl was guilty?

"She guilty!" shrieked the old woman. "She? Why, she is as good as she is beautiful. No, it's her vile mother I mean; a bad wretch, Signor, who beats that sweet child till either her arm fails or the stick breaks. Ask the cruel monster where her husband goes of nights, and see the eye she casts upon you. Their daughter's heart is breaking, but not from the stick only. If our good priest would speak, he could tell us all about it."

"How do you mean?" cried Alfred. "Do you suspect this mother of even worse crimes than that of cruelty to her daughter?"

"Do I? Ah, that I do," screamed the woman,

shaking close to Alfred's face her bony hands, with the fingers spread wide open as if she were going to count on them. "My eyes are old, but I saw Rosa the day she confessed. I saw her weep and beat her bosom, and I saw the good priest throw up his hands in horror and shake his gray head till it made me dizzy to watch him. If the blessing of such a child had fallen to me, how joyful would my house be in my old age."

There was great sympathy of thought on this point between the landlady and her lodger. For one moment, Alfred allowed himself to contemplate the enormous pleasure he would have felt from always having the captivating Rosa Maria near him. Probably he would have taken his apartments on lease. When he awoke from this dream he gave Margaritta a fine present, and sent her down to chop up more garlic and render the air poisonous.

Now three feelings absorbed all Alfred's thoughts, and made him the warm friend of Rosa Maria. He admired her beauty, pitied her sufferings, and wondered what were the crimes of which her parents were suspected. Curiosity alone is a strong hook to hang a man's thoughts upon; but when the others are added, you may consider that there is little chance of the brain remaining idle.

It was about this time that my unfortunate letter reached him. The answer, so remarkably savage in its tone, so rich in insult and fecundent of satire, may under the circumstances be excused. I have forgiven; and, excepting when he offends me, forgotten the circumstance.

CHAPTER III.

SHOWING HOW SOME PEOPLE HAVE NO BUSINESS TO
HAVE CHILDREN.

I HAVE seen a good deal of the world, and my experience teaches me that one of the most dangerous, stupid, thoughtless actions a young man can be guilty of, is to occupy himself with the misfortunes of a beautiful girl of seventeen, whose humble parents you could never disgrace yourself by acknowledging, and whose fortune consists of a picturesque but worn-out gown and a pair of shoes requiring mending.

Such folly must end in sorrow to one or the other of the interesting couple. The usual wind-up to these dramas is, that the seedy clothing and the ignoble parents are thrown off, and the devil rubs his hands over the downfall of the philanthropic protector and his pretty victim. That is the fashionable conclusion, so much admired by the wealthy bachelors who grace the highest circles.

But there have been instances where the man has been the sacrifice; where, to use the world's prudent phrase, "he has disgraced himself." The pretty damsel has exchanged her thick lace-up boots for a delicate pair of bronze high-heeled *bottines*, and skipped from father's sanded floor on to her dear husband's Turkey carpet. As she sits by the bright steel grate, and plays with her plain gold ring; or as she steals into her bed-room to read over again the certificate she can hardly believe to be true, she little thinks that for every blessing she calls down on her good man's

head, a thousand sneers are uttered by a thousand jealous Madams, who instruct their thousand footmen to deny their door to both "that weak-minded zany and his beguiling wife."

In such matters man must serve either God or Devil; you must choose for your judge between your Father in heaven and your father in Cavendish Square. It is a question of saving your soul or your position in society. I do not wish to lay down the law, but I have kept silkworms in my time, and believe in worms, coffins, wings, souls, and the old divines; and I would rather—although I had ninety years to live—the street door of the house where mother sits weeping were slammed in my face, than that the gates of Paradise were shut against me. But don't let me interfere with your tastes and fancies, I beg.

Now, I insist, that the most desperate of all philanthropy is that which meddles with women. It requires a man of thorough business habits to undertake such a task. No male under sixty or unmarried should be allowed to offer his amiable services.

It is so easy to imagine that the soft words uttered to a beautiful sufferer are merely intended in devout pity, that the hand so tenderly raised is only pressed from commiseration. Fly the temptation, "*Ad arcam perta il giusto pecca*," as we say in Italy. "Where the chest is open, good men may sin."

Take, as an example, the woes of my dear Alfred. There he was, good lad as ever breathed, trembling on the verge of wickedness, through his over sensitiveness for the afflictions of the golden-haired Rosa. To hint that he might possibly be deceiving himself, was

to be deluged with indignant virtue, hot, strong, and stinging. I, who could watch him calmly, and calculate nicely cause and effect, saw his peril very distinctly. He, bless him, never pulled on his nightcap without swearing to honesty, and vowing to be faultlessly pure. He kept his word, but—ah! well you'll know all about it in due time.

I say this (and though the wisdom is of the world, worldly, there is not a rich mother who will not pat me on the back for being so wise)—if you wish to be the defender of lovely woman, ferret out some sweet victim whose pretty hand has some twenty thousand pounds nestled in the palm—hunt up suffering wards in Chancery—deliver heiresses from spendthrift brothers—rescue wealthy innocence from grumbling guardians. Have a pay-day when the work is over.

But to labour hard and risk much, to toil long and suffer greatly, and when you have saved the pretty one to be puzzled what to do with the salvage—to feel that you ought to depart and yet haven't the courage to fly, that is hard recompense and a bitter settlement. Because we hear that a Yorkshire farmer beats his pretty Sue, is that a reason for taking the next train and rushing to the rescue. When she is quit of the family cudgel, what are you to do with her then? Make a Mrs. Sue of her? Or will you write out a bouncing cheque and start her in life handsomely?

Pray understand me, I am not advocating gross selfishness, or that a man should shut his eyes and ears to his neighbour's sorrows. What would become of poor me, if that was to become fashionable? No! I am only insisting upon the danger young men like

Alfred run, when they take upon themselves to rescue distressed beauties, and right the troubles of the pretty-faced world ; for I have invariably noticed, that they exert themselves most powerfully when the object of their sympathy is unmistakeably lovely.

They leave snub noses and squinting eyes to their miserable fate, but rave to thunder pitch over golden hair and deep blue eyes. On such occasions, I smell humbug in the air—invisible, yet oppressive humbug.

Had I the making of the laws of the land I would punish heavily any man who allowed himself to fall in love out of his proper station in life. I'd save the peace of families. No hot-headed five thousand a-year should gallop off with poor stale bread and gingham. John of the plough should keep company with Peg of the milking-pail. But as it is probable I shall never be invited to join the Ministry, the world must jog on in its old stupid ways, and rich young gentlemen fall in love as they choose.

A noble-hearted young man as ever had his hair cut, but fiery as naval rum and headstrong as a Welshman.

I had not been in his company ten minutes (it had struck me that a visit would not be impolitic after his really rude letter, for I am not one of those who let slip a fine income because of an angry word) before I thoroughly understood his alarming condition.

The man was on fire. There was no raving, but a quiet slumbering heat that must at some time or other burst out and be his ruin. If he had jumped about a little, and talked in a bragging way about this wench, I should have felt no alarm. But confound him, he

was sullen and calm, in fact, in just that state of mind when a man is ready to make a fool of himself, no matter what the risk.

I determined that a letter should, without a moment's loss, be sent to England. I vowed to save my friend, not for the sake of any temporary reward the Madam, in her gratitude, might insist upon my accepting. No! I vowed to rescue my dear companion—I loved the MAN. Had I not given him his first lesson in drawing? Was he not my artistic child? Yes; he should not disgrace himself whilst I was near.

I am a little bit of a diplomatist. The capital way in which I explained and arranged matters soon made us intimates again. I told him my only object in sending that letter was to test his morality, and, cried I, shaking his hand, "Nobly have you stood the ordeal. You are a grand fellow, sir! I am proud to be your drawing master, sir." Before an hour had passed we were into our second bottle, and he pouring out his secrets with the most imprudent confidence.

His curiosity about this Rosa Maria was very painful and embarrassing. He carried it, though, a *little* too far, I considered, for at last he had the—may I say—effrontery to ask my assistance.

Now, really, I felt no interest at all in this young woman, and to be asked to trot about the country, gathering information concerning a common fruit gill, was, I considered, a direct insult to the fine arts.

But I kept my temper, and to humour him, promised all the help I could. Like other rich fellows, he had no notion of exerting himself in these inquiries,

I was to do the hard work whilst he confined himself to the preaching. Talking of talking! Why actually he would come into my bed-room of a morning and bore me to death before my eyes were well opened. I might be, as it were, enjoying the fag end of a night's rest, just playing with the daylight—dozing and dreaming deliciously, when he would seat himself at the foot of my bed and begin the old story over again, expatiating on the girl's modest conduct and pathetic manner.

I found it very painful. The effort of pretending to be deeply interested when I was as drowsy as a night cabman, the exertion of inventing enthusiastic answers when I was muddled with sleep, kept my nerves unpleasantly stretched, for if I had given the wrong answers the idiot was capable of doing me bodily injury.

I'll give an instance. The second morning after my return, whilst I was in a delicious waking dream (I fancied I was the honoured guest of a magnificent feast and eating the most tantalizing delicacies) Alfred paid me a visit. He made me blink at him and stutter a reply or two until he fancied me perfectly awake, when at it he went raving about this Rosa Maria. I knew no more about what he said than a dead and buried man, for as soon as I could I was back again to the feast, and in less than ten winks, eating heartily.

He was, it appeared, complaining that he had not seen his beloved and could not meet with her. He was sure her brutal mother had locked her up. On these occasions he seemed to talk more to himself than to me, and even when wide awake it was difficult

to hit upon the proper reply. "A wretched creature," he cried, referring to the mother, "to raise her hand against that lovely child. What a heart of stone must that abandoned wretch have, to be unmoved by such a sad appealing countenance. To beat her! the brute."

I, in my dream, was at that precise moment enjoying, what I am very fond of, a grouse, and it would seem I mumbled out, "Yes, it's delicious!"

"Delicious!" he cried in astonishment, "delicious, to see the fairest skin that ever graced a woman's shoulders, reddened by a mother's blow! Delicious, to witness the terrible sight of an ungrateful parent raising her hand against the miraculous perfection she herself had brought into the world. No! no! do not say delicious!"

Still at my feast I muttered, "Yes, that's very nice."

The way in which he shook me, jerked open my eyelids with painful alacrity. He was rolling me about as if he was washing a cask. The mistake was hastily explained, and, except where he accidentally pinched my arm, had no painful consequences.

It was my desire to bring him over this love fit as rapidly as I could; therefore I at last consented to hunt up his hidden beauty. I was tired of Rome. The hotels are ruinously dear when Alfred is not with me to pay for the wine. I was disgusted with Soltano and Margaritta's cooking, and sighing to move towards some other picturesque spot—say Venice.

So I promised him my services. He was almost maudling in his gratitude. I was to learn all I could respecting Rosa Maria, her birth, parentage and condition, and, if possible, visit her in her own house, and

report thereon. I was to use my utmost endeavours to pierce the mystery of the girl's gloom.

In fact, had I followed his instructions closely, I was to cross-question, in the rudest manner, every boor I met, until one, more pugnacious than the others broke my head for me.

But I am not such a simpleton as he took me for. I undertook the office of inquirer merely because I fancied I might rapidly terminate the stupid romance. It was a great thing to be able to tell any story you pleased, and yet be believed. I could make out Rosa Maria to be anything I chose. I could favour her parents with such a character as would disgust him with their daughter. It was a power that I trusted would enable me to pack up our trunks and see a little more of lovely—sun-bright Italy.

The next day I was up and out betimes, sauntering about the country. I took a newspaper with me, and when I felt tired I sought out a wine shop, and sheltered from the sun by the overhanging vines, I read until I slept. Towards evening I returned home, hungry with exercise, and determined that if anything I could say would cure his madness, I would not spare the medicine.

"Had I any news? Yes! How could he thank me sufficiently. I must excuse his impatience! Would I mind telling him at once." This was his greeting before my coat was off.

"I can't say I've bad news," I replied, "for it is just what I expected. The whole country is, as far as I can guess, a vast nest of unhung robbers and vagabonds."

He laughed and rubbed his hands, "That agrees with what Margaritta tells me," he said, "she declares that the only way to destroy the brigands is to set fire to Nieti when all are in bed asleep."

I knew from this that he had been examining the old landlady, and I felt I was on ticklish ground. I thought I was pretty safe in saying, "Her parents are married—genuine marriage."

He could tell me more than I could him. "Yes! so Margaritta informs me, though Rosa's father has been dead many years—her mother has married again with a low fellow of the name of Paolo. They speak very highly of her dead father, say he was a fine upright old man. I expect she inherits her virtues from him. This Paolo is a downright scoundrel, I am told. Did you hear anything about him?"

To save myself, I pretended surprise that he should be as wise as I was on the subject. Be certain I did not spare Paolo, although it was the first time I had heard the villain's name.

I also saw clearly that it was no use trifling any longer with my sham inquiries, so I boldly set to work. Putting together the information I had gathered and what Margaritta told us, it was not long before we knew nearly all of Rosa Maria's history. As I have since heard it from her own lips, I can vouch for the truth of the narrative

Her father was one of those extraordinary men—born with prudence in them—who would manage to save up a handsome independence out of a parish allowance.

He began life with a few Bajocchellos, and worked

so hard that when it was his time to die he was worth a stocking-full of double Zecchinos. The few fields that composed his farm were the best cultivated in the village. He bore the character of being an honest, pleasant creature, of a merry disposition, and so good natured, you might pick his pocket as a joke.

Had he remained single, it was believed he would have lived to be three score, but happening to marry one Mona, he was at rest under the ground before he was forty. This Mona belonged to the genus *Felis domesticus*, one of those vixens who, during courtship, are as mild as breakfast bacon, but manage to get up a fine quarrel before the wedding feast is over. The old man bore up against her whims and ways until his hair was prematurely gray. He lived in the best manner he could for twelve years, and then preferred dying and seeking a little peace. He left one child, Rosa Maria, and a stocking full of treasure. The child, Mona was not much attached to, but the treasure she loved fondly.

The moment she was a widow, the meekness of Mona's maiden days returned; she became fascinating and gentle. By the tilt of her head all saw she was wealthy. She kept her nose at the genteel angle of forty-five. She displayed considerable taste in the richness and variety of her toilette. Her gold earrings were as large and heavy as quoits, and her fingers were ringed as thickly as a carter's whip. The young men gathered about her and decked her path with compliments. Of evenings she entertained these gallants to hot suppers and full bottles.

The sedate and high-minded inhabitants were

shocked at such gross behaviour, and remarked with considerable truth, that she couldn't have loved her poor husband much. Mona, when the rumour reached her, replied calmly that she had not. From that moment the women kept aloof from the bold creature.

Among this wolfish gang of hungry suitors there was one who stared more at the heavy gold earrings than the wearer's eyes, who never went courting to the widow's cottage unless there was a dainty meal to be eaten. He belonged to the class of handsome vagabonds who made a trade of their good looks. His head was like that of an ancient Roman warrior—classic even to the closely curled beard. It was honestly worth a shilling an hour as a model.

This fellow's broad shoulders and noble head were exactly to the taste of the widow, who, for fear he might not make love to her, prepared the way by courting him, and that not only with winning smiles and captivating glances, but with loans of money and high feeding.

The vagabond found himself in clover, and shifted his quarters from the wine-shop. He gave over his idle habit of sleeping in the sun. He renounced his beggars' philosophy that "life was too short for work, and if he couldn't beg a meal, or steal a meal, he'd eat leaves, and wait."

When first he crossed the widow's door, his clothes were such as would have been refused at a paper-mill. But presently he sauntered forth with the departed husband's best coat on his back. He boasted that he had the widow fast, and would marry her the moment she refused to lend him money.

Perhaps the woman heard of this, for the rogue, being pressed to settle a gambling transaction, had first to lead Mona to church. The debt was paid that evening. Thus it came about that the poor orphan Rosa Maria was blessed with a second father, who found her very useful of an evening to wait at table and serve his friends with constant supplies of drink. As she was the only one in the house who could read and write, he also made her his secretary. The orders sent to the dealers for fresh liquor were in her handwriting.

Coming suddenly into such a fine fortune, Master Paolo gave vent to his extravagance, and made short work of the big silver pieces with which the farmer had stuffed his stocking. The suppers were delicate, the guests numerous, and the gambling high. Before the summer had passed, the double Zecchinos had sunk as low as the ankle of the purse.

The love-lorn Mona was pained to find that, instead of passing her days listening to the praises of the amorous Paolo, she was ordered to attend closely to her stew-pans, and prepare savoury suppers. He, to her deep regret, never addressed his conversation to her so freely as when swearing over his losses at cards, or courted her society so earnestly as when it was necessary to extort a fresh supply of the precious metal. If she hesitated, he had a method of quieting her scruples, which never failed; or if he were not in a savage humour, he would put on his hat and be shortly seen prancing around every giddy girl in the town, until the jealous Mona, to win back her handsome fellow, considered it better to part with her money.

He boasted "he had tamed her." The wags would say it was a pity, for Rosa Maria's sake, the first husband had not known Paolo's method. The great fault of the process was, that it had only a partial effect. It made her civil enough to her ruffian lord, but caused her to be ten times more fierce towards her unfortunate child. She would escape from Paolo's presence fresh from a beating, and seizing the wretched Rosa Maria, make her feel what it was to have a suffering mother. The miserable child was glad to fly from the house and hide among the dry wood piled up for firing, there to crouch, and sob, and wonder, in her simple way, of what wickedness she could have been guilty, that Heaven should punish her so severely.

Gradually the stocking shrivelled up. The suppers, cold and common, were badly attended. It was also reported, that although Paolo carefully pocketed his winnings, he was apt to run credit for his losses.

The widow, after counting the few pieces left in the toe of the purse, declared that the strictest economy was advisable. Paolo, after borrowing half the sum, agreed with her they had better retrench. So, as a first step, Rosa Maria was put upon dry bread, and ordered to look out for field-work.

The unhappy girl passed two years of such cruel suffering, that it was a long and bitter struggle with her between her fear of Heaven and her weariness of life. We read sometimes in our daily prints of these infant misanthropes, who try to end their stay on earth after a short sojourn of fourteen years. But the cases are, praise Heaven, rare ; for it takes a deal

of care to kill a child's heart. They can sleep in baskets of nights and still be happy ; one meal in two days fattens them, and as for blows, they lead a black and blue existence. So when a child dies of its own wish and act, it may be inferred that its sufferings were more than ten strong men could have borne.

Life became, with Rosa Maria, a mere calculation, whether it was worth while to stay on earth and undergo her daily torment, or to end the torture by a five minutes' agony in the waters of the lake close by. She had heard the good pastor preach of the certainty all patient sufferers had of comfort in heaven after their earthly martyrdom, and it seemed to her a folly to endure when relief and happiness could be so easily obtained.

Her only doubt was, whether she had suffered sufficiently, whether her troubled life would be accepted as an atonement for her suicide. Her heart felt so heavy and broken, that a hope comforted her that she might die by the mercy of God. The elasticity of her child's nature had, from the weight that crushed it, become dead. She was leaden, hopeless, and weary to be gone.

She told me this herself.

When Mona's money was gone, and everything that was worth selling had been taken from the house, she, in her rags, worked in the fields, whilst Paolo returned to the wine shop to drink when it was offered him ; or sleep in the hot sun until he could borrow enough to join in the gambling.

Her love for the man never abated ; she worshipped the broad shoulders and classic head as hotly as ever,

though rags and dirt had considerably altered their attractions. She would eat little and work long, that he might have a few copper pieces to try his luck at cards. Wretched woman—he never even kissed her unless she gave him money, and even then he made a favour of the embrace.

Whenever he appeared among his companions with money, the laugh was, "Paolo has been hugging his wife."

His answer was, "The deuce take the woman, she takes a doppia's worth of kisses, and pays with a penny. It is hard-earned money. I must try another plan."

A most singular alteration suddenly occurred in Mona's cottage. The floor of the dirty house was scraped, the greasy walls were cleansed, the broken glass replaced, and new furniture made the rooms look smart and comfortable. The astonished Rosa Maria stared and wondered where the money came from.

The garden, which in former days had produced the best fruit in Nieti, was put in order, and a man engaged to till the land. Cows and poultry were purchased.

The neighbours stared and wondered whether it was Mona or Paolo who had inherited a fortune. To ease their minds Rosa Maria was sent the round of the village, to tell the grand news of Paolo having entered the service of a rich Englishman, who loaded him with presents.

"And, mind you, tell them," said Mona, giving the girl her instructions, "that Paolo is so much

engaged with his master, that he will scarcely ever be able to visit us."

The report flew from house to house, and was believed. Even Rosa Maria never doubted it, although she was awakened a few nights afterwards by the voice of her step-father grumbling in the room below. Had she been suspicious, she might have wondered how he managed to quit his wealthy master.

He must have entered at a late hour, when all the neighbours were asleep. She saw him leave as the day was breaking. He was armed to the teeth. "I hope he will get back safely before his master awakes," thought the simple girl, who was too good to doubt any one, however barefaced the guilt.

I think if I had uttered the wish, I should have sent the bullying ruffian off with a different form of prayer.

The gates of Paradise were opened to Rosa Maria when Mona told her, in her gruff, snappish voice, "I shall take care of the house, and you lazy-bones jump about and see if you can't earn your bread selling our fruit. You've got a pretty face, and ought to make peaches sell for double money."

She was ready to dance or weep with joy (with women either one or the other process answers the same purpose), at the idea of being free from her home-tyranny for a few hours in the day. It was a happy holiday for her when she joined the other village girls, and trotted away towards Soltano with her basket on her head.

Happy times had returned for Rosa. Wherever she went her sweet face forced people to become pur-

chasers in spite of themselves. Some bade her call each day, others paid her double for what they bought. They knew her mother well, and said, "If this child doesn't take home a heavy pocket, heaven save her back." Many a penny was given to ward off Mona's blows.

But, better than all, she met among these good people many who had known her father. These would coax the orphan into their dwellings, and tell her stories of the good man that was dead. She became very happy and submissive.

The next time she visited her priest, she confessed how bitterly she had been tempted to fling herself from this life, and give back her body and her sorrows to the world. He listened to the artless tale of how she had struggled with herself, and admonished her, with fatherly tenderness, for her impatient folly.

"The sufferings of yesterday are past and gone, my child, then of what use is it to fly from them. Who can tell what happiness to-morrow may not bring. You found it so. When the world seemed darkest, you, as you have told me, met with kind Christians, who brought back peace to your bosom. Because an arm aches would you cut it off? Then why throw aside a life because one day afflicts you?"

And Rosa sobbed out—"I have erred." Then he embraced her, and made her eat at his table, and presently dismissed her full of peace and consolation.

I almost use her own words.

The mystery of the now comfortable and flourishing house was Paolo. He would be away for months together, and if neighbours talked and Mona grew

alarmed, she would threaten Rosa Maria with beatings, unless she ran from house to house and spread the report that he was travelling with his master. Everybody believed what that child said.

Then he would return and remain hidden for days; hidden in the cottage, and Rosa was warned that if she betrayed his presence, her back should suffer for her tongue.

One night he arrived very late and very cross. He had a long and earnest talk with Mouna. They sent Rosa to bed, but from the sounds she knew they were busy carrying heavy weights into the cellars of the house. Next morning when she rose, he was gone.

When she visited Soltano she found the town full of soldiers. It was like a fête day. The inhabitants were offering them wine and bread. The gallant captain who commanded them walked about and sipped at the glasses proudly as a king. At last the brigands were to be exterminated—not one of them were to be spared. These were the brave soldiers that would purify the face of the earth—that was the brave officer who would tell them how to do it.

Everybody was delighted to think that the day of reckoning had come. When the subject of billeting the troops was broached, it was found that each soldier might have slept in at least three beds, so numerous were the offers of sheets and blankets.

Poor Rosa, infected by the enthusiasm, was half tempted to volunteer the spare bed at her mother's cottage; but her timidity saved her, and luckily; for I do believe that Mouna would have cut her into mince-meat. Indeed, her mother seemed to be the only

person who took these military arrivals in bad part. She called these noble soldiers by every bad vile name she could lay her tongue to. All her ill humour was shifted from her daughter on to these exterminating heroes. She became gentle and almost affectionate to Rosa, but attacked the troops with remarkable spite.

One night, whilst the little girl was in her bed, pondering over her mother's altered behaviour, and praying it might last, the door opened and Mona entered on tip-toe. The child was, in a whisper, ordered to rise and dress herself. She was to put on her thick walking-shoes, for they had far to go; but, above all, she was to be quick.

When she was ready, Mona placed in her hands a heavy basket, and taking a similar one herself, told the girl to follow. "And, mark my words, if you dare to make even noise enough to startle a mouse, I'll knock the very life out of you," added the tender parent. They left by the back door, Rosa trembling with alarm and surprise.

The basket was heavy with bottles and loaves. She heard the glass chink, and heard the wine splash. Where could they be going?

Across the fields towards Monteluna; up the narrow paths wired over with brambles. These were places in which even in broad day nobody dared venture. It was called a Brigand's home. If a goat strayed thither it was lost. The Brigands ate it. What would become of them if they should be discovered.

She more than once hesitated to advance, but the moment her footsteps ceased, Mona's head turned

round, and her black looks frightened every other fear out of her head.

They talk of the truth flashing upon the brain. No! no! it takes time to light the lamp that enables the mind to see clearly. Unfortunate Rosa had walked many a long mile before the truth even glimmered. The strange absences and returns of the burly Paolo, the arrival of the troops, the messages she had been made unconsciously to carry to the neighbours, everything was slowly explained. They were hurrying towards the Brigands' haunts! Her mother was undoubtedly bearing provisions to those outcast men! She had forced her poor child into the brutal task.

The girl's limbs nearly crumpled up under her. The basket grew heavy as lead, and her face so pale it almost shone in the darkness.

But Mona was there with her big strong hand ready to beat on the hesitating child. "On with you, lazy-bones! on with you, jade!" hissed the viper. Of all fearful things this mother was to her child the one most to be feared, so even the Brigands were for a short space forgotten, and she shuffled onwards.

They reached an open space, a kind of bald place on the hill top. Mona put down her load and blew into a whistle. The boughs around opened, and two men armed with long guns advanced. One of them was Paolo.

The girl, when she saw him, allowed her burthen to slip to the ground, and almost fainting, staggered back to a tree, against which she leant for support. She heard them talking together, but without the power of listening to their words.

Every prayer she knew she offered up, now following the church form of the supplication, now breaking off into earnest words of her own. She felt as if all her innocence had departed, and she had been thrust into endless wickedness without escape.

The moment of separation came. Paolo, taking Rosa Maria by the arm, said, as he tapped the barrel of his rifle, "Keep a silent tongue in your head, girl, or I have something here will talk as well as you."

"You needn't fear her," cried Mona, "she's safe enough! I wouldn't have brought her, but climbing these hills with those heavy baskets is more than I can manage alone. Let her dare to say a word, that's all! She won't do it twice, I'll warrant."

After this tender warning, she turned to Paolo, and throwing her arms round that dear man's neck, kissed him until he grumbled.

Now, good-bye to Rosa's happiness. How could she carry food to the Brigands, helping to keep them strong in body and light of spirit, and yet be happy? No more pleasant chats with the good folk of Soltano. When they mentioned her good father's name, she must weep for shame that the daughter of so worthy a man should be the provision bearer to robbers on the highway.

When the kind pastor met her and complained it was long since she had been to see him, she could only sigh as if her heart had turned in her bosom, and hurry away from his reproaching kindness. In whom could she confide? Where could she seek safety? To complain, was to doom to death the woman she called mother.

Each night came the summons to prepare for the midnight journey, and carry food to these unlawful men. What plots and wickedness was she not forced to listen to, and yet not dare to reveal.

She knew two days before the evil deed was committed that the chateau, near the lake, was to be ransacked. She could have warned the unsuspecting inmates, but her mother's eye held her like a chain. The agony she endured when she heard the spies relate how on such a day a carriage was to pass by such a road, or travellers were to stay at such an inn. How she prayed they might escape, although she knew their fate was sealed.

The loathing she felt for those demons who rubbed their hands over the good news, which at best meant a trunk rifled, or a life taken. To be forced to listen to their gross exultation at the success of such and such an enterprise, and to hear the woman she called mother laugh over the details of how this man prayed for mercy, or that wife begged for her husband's life.

She again began to think very calmly of the waters of the lake, and to long for the day of escape. No wonder Mona, as she struck her child one day, drew back in fear as the girl shrieked out, "Kill me, oh, kill me, mother! if you would but kill me."

The soldiers breakfasted well, and had glasses of brandy to make them brave. They were watched by the happy villagers, until they disappeared amongst the trees around Monteluna. These brave troops promised to kill the Brigands, and be back again in time for dinner.

One girl was promised a lock of the chief's hair as a gallant present, another was to receive as a memorial a ring from a dead rogue's finger. Everything was happily settled.

Away marched the plucky fellows in dashing order. The villagers, waiting patiently at their cottage doors, heard the firing and cried aloud, "Now the murdering vagabonds are being well paid in their own metal."

But dinner-time came, and though the firing had ceased no soldiers returned. What is more, they never did.

The Brigands had gained the victory, as, concealed behind the trees, the rogues had picked off their enemies as easily as partridges. The affair was noised abroad, and a second and a stronger force was ordered to avenge the disgrace to the army, and exterminate the vagabonds.

They, too, marched boldly to the attack, but never returned. Two victories for the Brigands! The strength of the outlaw band was greater than that of the government. They were left to pursue their ways without the sacrifice of more drilled soldiers.

The fame of the Captain Paolo spread through the province, and he could have enrolled a hundred devoted followers had he wished it. Servants at the first rebuke fled to the mountains, carrying with them the plans of their masters' house. Debtors endeavour to wipe out the claim against them by the death of the creditor. Secret intelligence of every kind reached the desperate rogues—they knew from the postboys where wealthy travellers were to pass—

valets sent them word at whose house the next ball was to be given, and bankers' clerks "advised" them who was to receive money, and who was to carry it.

Even the villagers took alarm, and housed their cattle and buried their poor savings, dreading to sleep at night lest the thief should be short of beef and the cow be carried off; or the good man be put to the torture till he confessed where his hard earnings were buried in the garden.

Having nothing to fear, Paolo, who was addicted to creature comforts, preferred returning to his wife's cottage to passing the night in the damp mountains. He left his faithful men in charge of his trusty lieutenants, and slept snugly under his own roof.

He found the home life more to his taste. The food was better cooked, and with Rosa Maria to wait upon him, better served.

The conversation that this bold captain and his forward spouse indulged in as they ate, often made their trembling attendant forget her duties.

"I'm puzzled, Mona!" simpered the vagabond, with the affectation of a great man. "We have two prizes, and for my life I do not know which to begin with."

"The richer," suggested Mona.

"No, the easier, I think," replied the villain.

"What kind of prizes are they?" asked the wife.

"I'll tell you," answered the chief, in an amiable tone. "Francesco reports that a certain French marquis, rich and well connected, can be had for the gathering. But, on the other hand, Bosco sends

word that he has an English artist, who is well worth plucking."

"An artist worth plucking!" cried Mona, in disgust. "Stuff! take the marquis."

"The Englishman might resist," suggested Paolo. "But still he's handy, close by at Dame Margaritta's." (Mona frowned and pointed at Rosa Maria, but he paid no attention to her caution.) "Still the marquis sounds like more money, eh? Well, then, to please you, my dear, we'll begin with the marquis."

On the morrow, Rosa Maria hurried to Soltano. She knew Margaritta's house well, nor did she rest until she reached it. Casting up her eyes she saw at the window Alfred, hard at work, painting. He was busy with his celebrated picture of the thirty villages.

I will confess he is a handsome fellow, perhaps slightly effeminate, but still handsome. There is an open, honest, calm look about his face.

As Rosa Maria watched him, twisting his head first on this side and then to that, now smiling with delight over his smudge, or passing his white hand through his long hair as he leant backwards to admire the master-piece, she thought, poor girl, that she had never seen so sweet a countenance, or one so guiltless. She compared his gentle features with those of the harsh, bold Paolo.

She was only seventeen, unfortunate child, and could distinguish a kindness of expression about this English artist, whose throat was to be so mercilessly cut, that made her heart flutter, and urged her pity almost into love.

"I'll at least save him," she vowed; "it will cost me my life, but since I am tired of it what matter?"

Now, without accusing Rosa Maria of being a forward minx, and speaking to strange gentlemen, we can thoroughly appreciate the Christian spirit which prompted her to warn the foreigner, who was wasting his time painting among the mountains.

CHAPTER IV.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL.

I KNEW nothing of the French marquis—the intended victim of the bravo Capitano Paolo—excepting that he rented a handsomely-furnished villa, and was reported to be a *bon garçon* and a *mauvais sujet*—the translation of which I take to be, that he "ne'er wanted a friend or a bottle to give him," and that he knew a pretty wench when he saw one, and spoke to her in a friendly manner without waiting for an introduction.

His wife, I heard, was so jealous of him, that whenever he was at home she abused him, and whenever he went out she had fits and spasms.

I felt predisposed to like the man, because he was said to be fond of pictures; and, being in the line, I encourage such characters with my approbation. His taste was for the old masters. I used to take my glass with four excellent jolly boys, who made a handsome income out of this marquis, supplying him with "won-

derful bargains," warranted genuine, and by the best of the ancient painter-Kings.

His villa was charmingly situated on the banks of the lake, with sloping gardens, damaged statues, mouldy fountains, cracked urns, and, in fact, everything that style can suggest and decayed art can furnish.

One night, when the moon was as big as a cart-wheel, and almost surpassing herself in brilliancy, the marquis was dandying about his garden, in that pleasant state of mind which proceeds from being rich and well fed, trying his voice at an operatic air, and between the bars blowing the smoke of his cigarette down his nose, when one of his first shakes was interrupted by a heavy cloak being flung over his head, rumpling his brutus and breaking his cigarette.

His delicate white hands were manacled by huge fists, and with his patent leather boots plunging, he was carried off in a kicking and half-suffocated condition.

Madame la Marquise wept that night to think her fate should be linked to so inconstant a husband, for she concluded that he was away at his pranks; but in the morning two letters were thrown by an invisible postman in at the open window.

The first was from the bravo Capitano Paolo, stating that he valued the life of the noble marquis at five hundred pistoles. He mentioned his partiality for gold, and his contempt for paper money. He suggested that the precious metal should be deposited on a certain night at the foot of a certain tree, when one of his bandit clerks would attend to the business.

If these instructions were attended to, the noble marquis would live to smoke cigarettes and admire the sex ; if not, he must be cut off in his prime, like a handsome cabbage.

The second letter was from the distracted nobleman himself, imploring his misused lady to forgive his past behaviour, and get his inclosed cheque rapidly cashed at the Roman bankers. He promised constancy and unflagging love if she would save his life.

Such threatening letters, since the victories over the Papal troops, had become common in the country. The Brigands drove a roaring trade. They never failed in their promises to spare or take a life. This honourable behaviour completely gained the confidence of the people, and their orders were punctually attended to.

The news of this outrage spread from village to village. Fruit girls, milk girls, and vegetable girls carried with them the full particulars, varying them slightly as their fancy suggested.

At length the tidings arrived with our daily salad at Margaritta's cottage, and I think I was the first to hear the story. I make no secret of the fact that I was frightened ; nay, I was deucedly alarmed. I had warning symptoms of that peculiar disease which blanches the blackest hair in a night. Both instinct and philosophy prompted me to fly to some shore where, if the fine arts were less flourishing, at least the police were more numerous.

Gracious ! Jingo ! If the villains should seize me ! Where could I raise five hundred pistoles ? They might as well demand five hundred brass cannon !

No, no! Hail the first steam engine, and live to fight another day.

In a state of fear that bordered on courage, I rushed into the presence of my pupil, gasped out my story, and wound up by inquiring when the packing was to begin. I rather fancy that in the delirium of my fear, I even went so far as to threaten that if he chose to stay, I should leave him to his fate.

"You can go when you like," was his cold, heartless reply. Was he tired of me? Was this the return my care deserved? He must have known that I had insulted Ikey Dingles, and was entirely dependent on his lessons. I call it brutal. I was either to risk the life I valued most in all creation—I refer to my own—and be hunted like a hare by a band of Brigands with bandaged legs, or I was to throw up the noble engagement I gloried in. Upon my word, some men have no hearts.

He was on his high horse, and full of sentiment. He objected to being dictated to. He despised brigands, he did. Stay he would if the air swarmed with the rogues. When I wished to know his object in staying, he was good enough to make no secret of it, but referred me to Rosa Maria. Botheration take the girl! He wished to fathom the mystery surrounding that lovely creature.

"But, my good sir,"—when I am angry I 'sir' him—"the girl herself warns you, with tears in her eyes, to fly the land. Then why not? If you love her, why not gratify her wishes? You really should!"

Again was I shocked by the tender of my own liberty, and a coarse intimation that the sooner I de-

parted the better he would be pleased. I had to exert all my diplomatic powers before I could change my painful dismissal into a leave of absence.

I fled for protection to Rome, leaving Alfred to peril his neck as he chose, and the Frenchman to save his life as best he could.

In one of the mountains where these wild brutes of Brigands concealed themselves, they had discovered a cave, which, with the addition of a strong door, they converted into a prison. It made a trap strong enough for that poor rat, the marquis. To add to his sorrows, the jailer appointed to attend—or rather not attend—to his wants, was that monster in female clothing—Mona. The gentleman had to forego his stews and kickshaws, and keep life going on a bread-and-water diet.

For three nights did Rosa Maria, carrying the provision-basket, follow her iniquitous mother into these mountain recesses. Madame Mona was a fine woman, lustily framed, and she found her round body heavy enough when climbing rocks, without adding to it the burthen of the prisoner's food. The daughter was useful to carry weights. The hag never felt any moral scruples about dragging her innocent child into the dirty work. She felt none even for herself. She called it making the girl do something for her living.

When they drew near to the prison in the cave, Rosa Maria, trembling with remorse and horror, gave up her basket, and, leaning against the rock-side, began praying and telling her beads. She was wonderfully given to praying and shedding tears. Her mother would have rated her soundly had she known

how fervently the daughter was beseeching mercy for the evil parent. Her supplications were frequently interrupted by the talking within the cave, the gruff voice of Mona answering the captivating simperings of the gallant marquis.

The moment the gallant Frenchman saw Mona enter his dungeon, he raised his hands in gratitude, for he was a very successful man with ladies, and reckoned that in a few hours his enamoured jailer would restore him to liberty. He attacked her affections with the pretty compliments that had turned the heads of so many girls. He might as well have tried to pierce stones with needles as captivate Mona.

"Heaven has not deserted me in my misfortune," lisped the silly humbug, "since a lady deigns to supply my wants. Will your gentle voice inform me if the answer to my letter has yet arrived?"

Mona, in a voice to make dogs crouch, answered, "In three days you will either die or be at liberty."

"Your countenance has an expression of amiability, tenderness, and pity," continued the stupid man. "I am filled with hope. May I suggest that, considering the distance we are from Rome, three days are a remarkably short time. The money might come, but too late."

"In three days you will die or be at liberty," again answered Mona, too prudent to encourage the conversation.

Rosa Maria sighed, "God help him!"

The marquis groaned "*Sacré*," and dropped the conversation.

When the third night arrived, Mona, having care-

fully brought to Rosa Maria's memory a very fine tree in a field near Nieti, desired the girl to see if the ransom had been left for the Frenchman.

"Look carefully about you," were the mother's orders, "and if the earth has been freshly turned, you will find buried a bag of money. Bring it to me. And mind this, if you mistake the tree, or lose the money, as sure as we breathe, the man dies, and you will have killed him."

The gentle-hearted girl stared as if she could not believe such words had been uttered; but Mona stood before her, shaking her brawny fist, and threatening with a cruel look; so Rosa, convinced that all was true, took to her old consolation of weeping and murmuring prayers.

There was something so intolerably horrible in this wretch making her child the instrument of her wickedness, that it positively stupified the girl. She stood trembling and begging for mercy, not by word of mouth (she had not courage for that), but with her large full eyes, that spoke more piteously than her tongue could have done. How the wretch could have resisted her I cannot tell.

"What are you stopping for?" growled the wicked woman. "Be off with you, and do something for the bread you eat. Do you think I'd trust you to fetch the money if I could go myself? Be off, you lazy slut! unless you want the man to be murdered."

The idea of another's life being risked by her delay decided her. She turned round and fled. Yes! in mercy for the stranger she would go, and in mercy

for herself she would, the errand done, depart never to return.

This is just as she told the story to me many times. This child has been, in her early days, tenderly brought up by a father who carefully shielded her from harm of body and harm of mind. She had wondered why the same affection should not also be extended to her by her mother. She had watched how other children were treated by their parents, and soon learnt that she belonged to the unfortunate few who are deprived of home love. Instinctively she felt that Mona, in violating her duties, had destroyed all claims upon her child's attachment, and renounced her maternity. Yet there was no idea of anger or jealousy at being so cheated. What might have been love was changed into good will ; she felt gloomy and alone, but had no sense of retaliation.

She vowed to leave the mother who, by attempting her child's innocence, had given up all right to obedience. She would no longer serve in wickedness. Away to strange lands and strange faces, so far away, that even her language would not be understood, there to beg her bread if necessary ; but to remain among these demons, and aid them in their devilry, that for her soul's sake she would no longer suffer.

When she reached the tree, she leant against it awhile to collect her thoughts—and then, kneeling, hunted among the bulging roots for the money-bag. For no want of care on her part should the prisoner's life be forfeited. Wherever the earth seemed fresh, she scratched it away with her fingers. She worked as hard as a terrier digging up a rat. She lifted

stones and pulled at the grass to see if any sod had been cut away to conceal the ransom more cunningly. At last she did find the treasure, but so knowingly stowed away that any one less patient would have given up the search. The reflection that at least she had effected some good in her evil, lulled the aching at her heart.

The next day the marquis returned to his villa in time to join his lady at breakfast. The perils he had encountered, the courage he had displayed, were related to his admiring friends, and lost nothing in the telling. For years to come he was a made hero. He became a celebrated man, and eventually made his fortune out of this adventure with the Brigands.

Perhaps, at the very moment when the Frenchman was attacking his first cutlet, Rosa Maria was paying a visit to her friend, the good priest of Soltano, determined to confess all, and follow her pastor's advice.

The old priest knew as well as the girl herself the sorrow that was crushing her; for, only the day before, that rascal, Paolo, frightened by his dreams, had cast himself before the Father, and, with genuine tearing of hair, and earnest beating of bosom, had called himself by all the evil names his tongue could catch hold of, and made a clean breast of his crimes. This utter vagabond had wept like a child, and knocked his forehead on the stone flooring till it was black with bruises, whilst his priest threatened him with the vengeance of heaven and the terrors of hell unless he quitted his unclean ways and repented truly. The old father had even menaced to cast him from the church if he returned to his sin.

The rogue, frightened beyond endurance, had vowed and protested he would become an upright citizen and fear the laws, and bear no envy or malice in his heart ; until, at last, he almost convinced the pastor that he was as truthful as he was energetic in his repentance.

So when Rosa Maria, almost childish with sorrow, told in the simple language of deep grief the same story Paolo had bumped his forehead over, the old man, though he raised his hands and shook his head in horror at the trials the girl had withstood (Margaritha saw him), yet counselled her to return to her mother and be patient for a time, promising her, as directly as he could without violating the sacred secrecy of his office, that for the future neither would these acts and scenes of infamy be repeated, nor would her assistance in them be required. The poor girl, having great trust in the pastor's guidance, rose up with hope, and promised to obey.

It has often been a marvel to me why this miserable girl, to free herself from her constant persecution, did not go over to the enemy and enter with all her strength into crime. Don't fancy that her trials ended here. They were only just beginning. For myself, I must confess, I should never have attempted to resist, as this weak rush of a woman did, against the storm.

For a time Paolo stayed at home and lived on the ransom of the marquis. The priest had prophesied well, for the murders and the rapine ceased. But there was a trial in reserve for Rosa Maria which nearly crushed the little strength left in her heart.

That scoundrel, Paolo, being much in the girl's company, discovered that she was very fair to look upon and determined to make her his Brigand Queen. The man was the king of the country—a real autocrat, satiated with success and power. His word was law with seventy devils as bad as himself, who had no notion of thwarting his slightest caprice. He vowed to possess Rosa Maria.

The woman Mona had grown into an ugly crone, coarse and wicked, with white hair and black soul. Her intense affection and unscrupulous devotion had sickened the rogue. The girl was unmistakeably beautiful, and her countenance influenced him as it did other men; only they stopped at admiration, whilst he rushed headlong into lust.

He thought he was powerful enough to risk the jealous fury of even such a tiger-cat as Mona. It would be a desperate battle, but what, he thought, can a woman's nails do against the firing of a pistol?

Now, whenever he returned to the cottage, he always brought with him some present for the charming maid. A pair of ear-rings taken from the ears of a lady dressed out for a ball, was his first offering. The fine clothing and rich laces plundered from a chateau close by were his next gift.

Of course Rosa understood how these trinkets and rich apparel were obtained, but (considering the finery was the first of the kind she had ever seen) it required a good girl, with a keen sense of honesty and justice, to withstand the temptation of such bribes. Had she been weak enough to accept them, she had lost her soul.

A woman, however innocent she may be, can, at

half a glance, divine the meaning of such donations. At first Rosa Maria pretended to be ignorant of the fellow's motives, and handed over each present she received to Mona, as if intended for her. The old woman, enchanted to find her husband so attentive, grew crazy with love, and disgusted the rogue with her overwhelming caresses.

He tried to make the girl understand that the gifts were intended to adorn her own beautiful person ; but the gold watch and chain he, as he spoke, placed in her hand, were the next day hanging from Mona's neck. He would have slain Rosa Maria from spite, but the defence which hung around this good maiden was the very love she inspired.

He pestered her with his services. Wherever she went he followed. He waylaid her in passages, and holding her round the waist, began telling her how he worshipped her perfect body. If her mother sent her to fetch wood, he was soon after her to seize her hands as she reached the faggot, and kiss them passionately. When returning from her journey to Soltano, if, to avoid him, she chose the by-paths, he traced her with the keen eye and speed of the hound, and her solitude only increased her danger.

The vagabond was puzzled to account for Rosa Maria's steady chastity. The thought never entered his head that the girl resisted from any virtuous reason. Himself totally devoid of anything like moral influence, he so completely believed in universal iniquity, that whenever he met with any resistance to his villany, he instantly tried to affix some worldly reason to the objection.

In this case he imagined that she held back from fear of Mona. In his next declaration of love, he endeavoured to win her confidence by tenderly promising her, that if Mona interfered in the matter, "she should go," which, without doubt, meant he would kill her.

Perhaps to have some excuse for ridding himself of the old woman, perhaps to frighten the girl into submission, he began to court her in her mother's presence. The heavy brow of the astonished wife lowered over her piercing black eyes, and her grizzled head shook with passion.

There were noisy scenes at every meal. The wife howled out vengeance, and the husband swore protection. During these discussions, Rosa Maria had to suffer the double indignity of her mother reproaching her as if she were guilty, and of the man strengthening the accusation to his utmost by his tender manner and affectionate defence.

She was only seventeen—had suffered much and complained little. So solitary did she feel, that it seemed to her as if she had, without permission, entered a strictly private world, and intruded among the rightful occupiers.

She was in exactly that impressionable condition of grief, when a few gentle, simple words, spoken unexpectedly from disinterested kindness, act quickly on the heart, and have their remembrance for ever.

On the day when she first warned Alfred against the danger preparing for him, she had acted from an impulse of pity—nothing more. The boy has a calm,

innocent face, with a quiet, contented expression ; which, considering that he has nothing to bother himself about or think of, is not extraordinary. Under similar circumstances I have no hesitation in saying, I should appear equally serene. But that same calmness and innocence of look struck this girl as something inexpressibly beautiful. After Mona with her coarse, brutal features, and coarser and more brutal tongue, after the licentious, animal countenance of Paolo, whose law in life was that whatever he could do he had a right to do, Rosa Maria herself told me, that it rested her tired eyes to see a face so full of kindness and so free from passion.

She thought of Alfred constantly from the time of their first meeting. But it was not until he had spoken to her in his peculiar, soft, and pitying voice, that he became her all in all. His sympathizing glances completed the conquest. His deferential manner astonished her. He looked admiration and compliments, but spoke none. That a rich gentleman should be civil to a girl whom even brigands knocked about, appeared a great marvel. At her request he had not attempted to follow her at parting. He was the first person who had ever obeyed her wishes. That proved he was generous and considerate. Nobody else she knew was.

From the conversations which Paolo, occasionally in her presence, held with his wife, Rosa Maria gathered enough to understand that the designs against the rich Inglese were not abandoned. Whilst the marquis occupied the dungeon in the rock, Paolo had, one evening, fumed with rage because an excellent oppor-

tunity of seizing my dear Alfred had, for want of prison accommodation, been lost.

I fully believed that on the occasion referred to by the Capitano, I was with Alfred, and if so a brace of birds would have been bagged. One of the birds would have moped and regretted this adventure deeply.

The girl, excited by what she had witnessed of the treatment, and narrow escape of the marquis, trembled for the fate of the Englishman. Suppose he should have no money, she thought; how could he in three days send to his distant friends for the sum placed on his life. She pictured to herself the tragic ending on the evening of the third day, when the final volley was fired, and the body fell backwards down the steep rocks. The gentle, guileless face, with the calmness of death upon it, haunted her dreams. She had vowed to save him, and no matter what the peril, save him she would. It might bring about her own release from life. What of that! better be sent to heaven with one good action to weigh against her sins, than seek paradise through the waters of the lake. That was how it came about that she gathered up courage enough to speak to Alfred.

Ever since she had taken upon herself the office of guardian angel, she grew importunate in her endeavours to frighten him out of the dangerous country. It became a necessity to see him daily, and repeat the warning. The frowns of Mona only made her wish to rescue Alfred from their ugliness; the coarse courtship of the capitano recalled the memory of the polite Englishman,, and the danger that threatened him.

Every morning, as she passed his window, she

looked up imploringly, and was answered by the most devoted eye responses. He waylaid her on her return homeward, and now she was as anxious as he was for the meeting—he all smiles, she with tearful eyes and pale sad face; he with praises, she with entreaties and warnings.

When she supplicated him to return to Rome, and asked why he stayed, the answer was "Because I love Rosa Maria." When she prayed him not to delay a minute if he valued his life, he replied, "He did not value his life when parted from Rosa Maria."

Always the same kind of affectionate response to the same kind of affectionate implorings. She loving him more and more, as her fears increased, perhaps, because he made more and more love to her when she sought him out to caution him of the danger.

The seizure of the marquis had paid the Brigands well. Without exchanging a shot, or chancing a wound, a big bag of gold had been divided among the troop. It was time to think of more work of the same safe character. The capitano and his old wife began to whisper together, and the girl to keep her ears on the stretch.

As she sat by the hearth knitting, she scarcely breathed for fear a word should escape her. She could hear her heart throb and feel it shake her side, and the air around her seemed to rustle, so intently did she listen. Yet her eyes never moved from her work, and her fingers moved rapidly. At length one night she heard, though her face never altered its expression, the bravo Paolo announce that everything was, at last,

ready; the spies on the look-out, and the men prepared and stationed.

A feeling of hope warmed her when Mona spoke sneeringly of the expedition. That low woman had no respect for artists, and she was opposed to running any risks to trap a bird that after all might not be worth a robbers' cooking.

"I've seen hundreds of these artist fellows," argued the woman, "scamps who will paint you pictures by the mile for mere belly-pay; who, if portraits are not wanted, have to starve. If you take my advice, you will not meddle with such tatters. Their pockets and their elbows have holes. Leave them to the rag merchant."

The girl had to restrain herself, and check a strong desire to back Mona's disgraceful opinion of the gentlemen of my profession.

The capitano knew his own business too well. "I am right enough about the man," he answered, quietly. "There's plenty of gold there. If his pockets have holes his bankers have confidence. Bosco swears they never once refused him money. He's safe enough. If he isn't, so much the worse for him."

"You'd better do as I tell you," continued the woman, "and try somebody else. You say there were two of them. Suppose you take the wrong one?" Great heaven! she was talking of me!

"Do you think Bosco is a fool?" retorted Paolo, growing angry. "The other fellow has gone away. He is only one of his servants. He borrows money from this rich one. Bosco says he is as big a

robber as any in our band. I should like to shoot him."

Considering this disgraceful villain was speaking of me, I hope nobody will believe him. Look at his character! Do you think this scoundrel capable of truth, even of the lowest order? As for Bosco, I despise the fiend, and wish I had never given him that shilling.

Rosa Maria could hear no more, for she felt her senses failing her; and the dread of arousing suspicion forced her to use every effort to keep together her mind and strength. She staggered from the room, and, crawling up the stairs, threw herself upon her bed, there to pray and weep, as usual, and think over the terrible conversation. Like all highly emotional idiots, she, even before the real danger arrived, underwent the same sorrow as if every evil was accomplished.

She reproached herself for having delayed so long to trust this stranger with the revolting confession of her parent's infamy. It was, she thought, the only way to convince him of his danger. Still, it was a task too full of horror to be used before the last moment.

Now she made up her mind to the self-sacrifice. She felt certain he would turn with loathing from her as the associate of brigands and murderers. But no matter! her object was to save him; he might cast her from him, but his life must be preserved.

In the morning she stood at the door of Margaritha's cottage. The old woman was absent, but Rosa Maria could hear Alfred's voice singing as he painted.

She felt no reserve, no fear of the judgments that might be passed on her conduct; but, ascending boldly to his door, and without even giving warning, she entered.

My friend had thrown his brushes away, and rushed to her side before she had advanced two steps into the room. Pale as death, and her white lips working spasmodically, she stood timidly glancing at him, evidently frightened at the bold step she had taken. He had just time to place her in a chair, when her strength gave way, and her head fell helplessly on his bosom.

The first idea Alfred had was, that the child had fled from her mother's roof—driven away, perhaps, with blows. He called to her by the tenderest names; he thanked her for trusting to his honour, and vowed the purest and most faithful love a friend could offer.

But she never heard a word of his fervent discourse; for, just as he ended it, she, with a big sigh, recovered her consciousness. He gave her the water she murmured for, and, holding her cold hand, watched over her in silent sympathy.

When she felt she could speak, instead of noticing the pretty speeches he had begun, she stopped him by saying, "If you wish to live, you must leave here to-day. Will you believe me, and depart?"

He again commenced to swear never to leave her, and to pour out his oaths of affection, despite the cry of pain with which she said, "Oh! santissima Virgine! he will not go. Must I, then, tell him all!"

The mystery about this girl was enough to excite his curiosity; but it would have been more kindly to

spare her the martyrdom. "We speak together for the last time," she said, in a weak, calm voice. "I must frighten you away with horrors, and so end your love for me. Yes! you have made me love you too; but the sacrifice must be."

She shook her little round head mournfully, and her large eyes grew larger as they swelled up with tears. There was a staring look of distracting grief, and her voice was solemn and low as that of one worn out with pain and long-suffering.

"If you are as good as I believe you to be," she said, "you will leave me in pity, not in loathing; for how could I, a poor girl, escape from my lot? Heaven grant that this terrible secret may enter gently by your ears, and not doom me to your scorn."

Then, still looking before her with her big wet eyes, she told her story as you have read it; without hiding one word to save her disgrace. She called Mona her mother, and even spoke of her with charitable tenderness.

In the simple wording of an innocent, ingenuous mind, she related her life from the happy days when her father was alive, to the terrible moments of Paolo's time. It was only when it became necessary to detail the circumstances connected with the marquis in his prison, that her self-command quitted her. She seized Alfred by his arm, clutched at his coat, and cried, "Oh, in mercy to me, go! O God! cause him to go! To-morrow—to-morrow you may be groaning in that cave. But no! in mercy you will depart; give me, by your absence, strength to die a Christian death."

If she had consulted me before making this confession, I could have told her that it was the maddest thing she could do, if she wished to succeed in her plans. Her devotion appealed to his generous, self-sacrificing nature, and made him obstinately resolve to rescue the unfortunate girl.

He was always telling me that once in a man's life some grand chance of doing a great good was thrown into our paths, and that Heaven tested us by our readiness for the work. He was the last man to turn with contempt from the generous woman. He stood listening intently, a big man with a throbbing, leaping heart, over-running at the eyes at each sob she gave, and trying, by the touch of hand, or murmur of commiseration, to check her sorrow.

He was in no humour for obeying her commands. "Go! you ask me to go!" he cried. "Think what a bitter scoundrel I should be if I obeyed you! Could I leave you—poor weak innocent—to fall a victim to this wretch Paolo? Can I fly from you, and live in peace with the certain conviction that, before many hours are past, you may, perhaps, be calling upon me to rescue you? No! I will only go on one condition."

She snapped out an answer, "What condition?"

"You must come with me," he replied, with great decision.

She covered her pale face with her bloodless hands, and let her voice trickle with her tears through her fingers. "Oh, miserable me! unhappy me. No, no, we must separate; you to return to your home, I to mine. You are rich and have dear friends to re-

ceive you, I—I am the child and associate of brigands and murderers. No, no, you must go alone.”

She seemed to him the incarnation of purity and goodness. The fact of her immolating herself in the mere hopes of saving him, appeared almost the romancing of charity.

“Good Rosa, dear Maria, what is there in common between you and those vagabonds that you should so reproach yourself? Your father was an honest man and you have inherited his nature, and not that of your deluded mother. Listen to me, I cannot leave here without you. Come to my country with me. I will be a brother to you. My mother will protect and love you.”

I doubt that; but it was, no doubt, consoling to the girl.

“Heaven protect us both from such temptation,” calmly answered Rosa Maria. Those Italians are quicker blood than we are, and at seventeen are women. “I must not risk suffering in heaven as well as on earth.”

The exhibition of such self-disinterestedness sent Alfred into a paroxysm of admiration, during which he clasped her to his bosom and piled up names of glory on her head. He spoke of the quiet life and enjoyment they would lead—how he would study to restore her happiness and blot out all painful memories—how she should never repent trusting to him—her brother.

This brotherhood of gentlemen’s sons for peasant girls is always, in my eyes, a doubtful relationship.

Alfred often in after days swore to me that he

meant it, and would rather have parted with breath than betray so pure a woman. But evidently Rosa Maria thought as I did, and dare not trust his words; they were too warm and impulsive.

"You are," she said, rising, "more dangerous to me than even Paolo. I will go back to him, for there I have confidence in myself. Here I feel very weak and helpless."

"You shall not leave me," cried Alfred, "still furious with love, "unless you promise to meet me again to-morrow early in the day, anywhere; but I must see you, or I will risk the Brigands to find you."

First he was forced to promise that he would never quit the shelter of the town, then she warned him that spies were to surround him and watch his movements. An oath was exacted that he would never expose himself abroad. In return, one more meeting was promised.

Poor thing, it was as great a temptation to her as to Alfred.

She came for good and left without harm, for Margaritta was still absent when she left the house. Alfred, leaning from his window, watched her to the turning of the street, hoping that she might look round if only as a farewell.

My dear friend threw himself on his couch, and at full stretch upon his back stared at the ceiling and made himself unhappy. The idea entered his head that he and Rosa Maria had parted for ever, that he never should speak again to the noblest woman he had ever known. He persuaded himself that, after her confession, a false shame would keep her away.

The more he pondered the more convinced he felt, until growing restless with regret he rushed into the street and wandered about, hat in hand, muttering in English all the speeches he would—should he ever meet her again—make use of to coax her over to London.

As the time drew near when Rosa Maria on her way home passed the place where their appointments had been kept, he calculated whether, supposing he hurried to the old rendezvous, there would be a chance of wishing her a good night.

It was a chance, a mere chance, but in his frame of mind that was the same as a certainty; so, forgetting his promises of caution, away he rushed for one more glimpse at his adored.

He missed her by a few minutes, but he did not know that she had passed. He fancied he had arrived too soon; and there he remained watching the road, and looking at his watch, wondering what could detain her to so late an hour.

The next day, when Rosa Maria passed through Soltano, Alfred was not at his window; and after knocking at the closed door of Margaritta's cottage, she inquired of a neighbour if he could tell her where the old dame might be found.

"I don't think she'll want any fruit to-day, Rosa Maria," answered the man, "she's off looking for her Englishman."

The girl stared inquiringly.

"It's the first time the signor has stayed away for an entire night," he continued, "and Margaritta vows the Brigands have got him in their clutches."

CHAPTER V.

IT BEGINS TO BLOW WARM.

WHEN Rosa Maria heard that Alfred was in the power of the Brigands, she—owing most likely to her faulty education and hardy bringing up—did not faint. You mustn't blame the girl. Remember, she was pure country bred.

She turned very pale though, and felt her eyesight fail her, while balls seemed to rise in her throat and nearly choke her, but in less time than the opening of a scent-bottle, she had conquered herself, and was trying to think over what had best be done.

Can you imagine a more painful position for a girl to be placed in. She had sworn to deliver her dear love, but, Heaven help her! she was very weak and powerless for the work. I would have laid long odds against her succeeding. The mouse, it is true, did set the lion free, but then what a lucky mouse it was. If seventy cats had been watching over the lion, I fancy the mouse would have been soon digested.

Against this slim-waisted girl, armed with nothing more dangerous than her bodkin, stood ranged seventy first-rate Brigands, all good shots and uncommonly unscrupulous.

And how was the brazen-faced Mona to be overcome. The rogues must be annihilated, and dear mamma toppled over before Alfred could swear he was the proprietor of his own head. Decidedly the betting was dead against Rosa Maria.

They have no police-office at Soltano, neither can

you appeal to any active officer before whom you can lay your case and seek for advice. It was no use, in that shockingly protected town, having five hundred handbills printed, headed "Missing," and offering ten pounds reward. No description of Alfred, however flattering, either to his clothing or features, would have been of the slightest use.

Nothing could be done but to trust to time and cunning. That is a species of credit which makes many bad debts.

Our unfortunate girl wandered about the town, asking useless questions and receiving absurd replies.

The grocer, a gay man, said his opinion was that Alfred was running after some pretty girl, and would come home safely enough without their troubling their heads about him. This Rosa Maria objected to as highly improbable, and instantly disbelieved.

The baker, who loved a drop, either by sun or moonlight, affirmed that all Englishmen were known to be beastly sots, and volunteered to swear the man was in Rome, and very likely drunk.

But most of the populace arrived at the conclusion that the artist had run up a long score with dame Margaritta, and, to avoid paying, had bolted. They remarked, winking with excess of sagacity, "Do you think the dame would wring her hands and rush about after this Inglese, as she does, if all her bills were settled? Is it natural? Why, he's only a foreigner!"

Rosa Maria sighed, and thought what a beautiful land England must be to produce such sweet males.

Presently, homewards came Margaritta, trembling with anxiety, and heading some twenty neighbours

who had volunteered to assist in the search. The whole band gave it as gospel truth that Alfred was a dead man. They bore his loss with noble fortitude, and even made it an excuse for knocking off work for that day.

Old Margaritta was more demonstrative in her sorrow "for the blessed gentleman," and seemed to have a real affection for one who had paid liberally, and treated her with, to my fancy, the most absurd courtesy.

Soon the two women were alone, talking over the sad event, Rosa Maria endeavouring to her utmost to make her affection appear like curiosity, and old Margaritta—who, when young, had known what it was to be worried—seeing through the disguise as easily as her spectacles.

Merciful Heaven! had they no tidings of the Inglese? asked the girl.

Yes, indeed they had, but useless ones, such as the cap he wore on his blessed head and the stick he carried in his cherished hands.

The saints be praised! but where had they found these comforting relics?

Where, but among the rocks from which the dear youth loved to sketch the valley.

Did Margaritta think he had defended himself?

Great mercy protect him! the grass was trodden, but no blood could be discovered.

Glory for all things! was that all the news?

Yes, they had crept up the mountains, and searched the woods—ay, even the banks of the lake

had been visited, but in vain. They had not found his sweet body, so perhaps he lived.

"Pray God!" sighed Rosa Maria.

"A good youth!" said Margaritta, sobbing.

"And gentle!" added Rosa, in tears.

"So honest!" groaned the old woman.

"And so handsome!" cried the young one.

There is no positive measure for the exact amount of sorrow the human mind is capable of supporting, but close observation assures me it can pull along with a load that would rick the hind leg of a cart-horse.

I know a man that has buried two wives, and yet laughs at three mutton chops for dinner.

Our little maiden had gone through such a course of suffering that her spirit had become tough of muscle and strong of bone, and ready to fight against any calamity. She was accustomed to disappointments, well-trained to tussle with big griefs, inured to adversity, and clever at endurance. The moment she felt satisfied that Alfred lived, she become all energy. Her fragile body was filled with a peculiar, dogged, obstinate strength that nothing should tire out, as if ten lives had been infused into her blood. Her courage was like that which sings a hymn of praise as it climbs up the faggots around the stake. I believe she would have been equal to offering the executioner a light, if he had forgotten to bring one with him.

Of course she made up her mind to be murdered by the Capitano and her mother; that she felt very confident about. But, bless me, when we are tired of life, what better use can be made of it than offer-

ing it to some one who yet yearns after green fields and baked meats. You do such charity with your old clothes. Such offerings plant the foot firmly on the first round of Jacob's ladder, and steady the climbing to heaven. If ever a woman was destined to wear wings, it was Rosa Maria.

There were two plans of deliverance to choose between. She might rush to Rome and search for me; or failing that, claim the assistance of the Government, and herself lead, by the secret paths, the picked troops sent to deliver her lover.

But this was equivalent to taking her mother's life, and it is an ugly thought to leave this world splashed with a parent's blood. However evil the old crone might be, her eleventh hour had not sounded yet, and repentance was possible. Besides, at the first glimpse of a soldier's gun, the prisoner's life would be cut out of him.

No! the deliverance must be effected by stealth. She must pick locks, steal keys, drug drink, or something after that fashion. As for Alfred being able to procure his ransom-money, that she never relied on, and execution, with those villains, followed non-payment even more rapidly than in the legal way, sharp as that is.

So this girl gathered up her scattered courage and bound it closely together with desperation, until the bundle was more than seventy brigands could break. She entered her mother's cottage with an upright carriage and steady foot. Her forehead was burning, and her face red with fevered blood, but her bold manner and assured bearing made her flushed face look as though it were glowing with excess of health.

Her brain was in a sing-song twirl of confusion, like smoke through which the wind is driving, but above the jumble of her thoughts arose the one sounding idea, "I will save him."

She met Mona's gaze as calmly as if all was at peace and comfortable; no twitching of the mouth corner, or dropping of the eyelid to hide the uneasy eye. No! she stared back again, as if defying the old wretch.

Madame Mona should have been warned by the glitter in her daughter's eyes; she should have noticed how open and bright they were, how they pushed forward as if the brain behind were pressing them from their place—in fact, how like a mad irresponsible creature the girl was. Then she should have locked her up securely, and consulted with Paolo the brave!

If ever I fall into trouble, may heaven send to my rescue some dozen Italian girls who love me! I ask for no stronger help. Leave guns and savage dogs to those who believe in such aid, but send me, oh! send me the dozen faithful, loving girls.

I have my reasons, as you shall see. Persuade a woman that you love her—I do not even say it is necessary to love her, but only to make her think so—and then, my friends, you have at your disposal a most convenient and terrible weapon, ready as a kitchen poker to go through fire, or happy as a pirate's crew to take to water for your service. Examples of this headlong devotion are, I am told, more frequent in hot countries, where girls of fifteen have the forms of women and the passionate impulses of children; in

the same countries where snakes, citrons, tigers, or palm-trees flourish.

With us in England, devotion takes the form of meek, uncomplaining suffering ; the poor girl swears she has over-eaten herself on a dinner of one slice of bread, or walks five hundred miles barefoot to get Tom's reprieve. But among the fiery-blooded ones of the sun-burnt lands, they are wonderfully enthusiastic in their affections, and of such was Rosa Maria. They are so reckless, they escape suspicion by their very openness, for we all believe evil designs must necessarily be secret. They have a cat-like power of patient watching that almost passes for sleepy indifference, until the moment for the pounce arrives. In wet and cold they are ready to walk the earth. Whilst the bullets are falling around, they are delighted to rush at the object of their love, and fling their arms about his adored neck.

Such devotion I call heroic and, beyond expression, useful and deserving of praise.

We men, I confess, are slower in our impulses, and are apt to stand and think until the moment for assistance has passed. We appeal to what some call judgment, and others an excuse for cowardice, until the fight is over.

I, for one, have a wholesome dread of forlorn hopes and rifle balls weighing an ounce. As a rule, men talk more, and offer more sound philosophical advice, but they perform less. I question if many men would be willing to risk death for the life of their fondest. It is reported that they throw up their love if the brother is inclined to duelling, and should papa shake

his cane, they run like antelopes. I am rather disposed to the belief that our love begins with animal passion, and that it would soon pass away, but for the fact that the women become infected, and by making love to us, prevent the affection from dying out.

In this desperate condition of devotion was Rosa Maria—reckless and determined. Now there was no endeavouring to avoid Mona's society; no skulking from the room when mother's footstep was heard approaching; no hiding in bed-rooms. She stuck close to Mona's side, always busy with something or other, but listening as closely as if her ear were at a keyhole, lest a word which might reveal Alfred's fate should, from inattention, escape her hearing. If the woman left the room, the girl followed her with her ears.

She even tried to coax the old crone into gossiping, as if such an old fox was to be wheedled out of her secrets for the sake of a chit-chat. The continued absence of the bravo Capitano was, she argued, a good sign; for he was evidently busy with his prize, and could not leave his band.

The great hope that supported her was, that when night came her mother would, as usual, employ her to carry provisions to the mountains. It was an easy way of creeping into the stronghold. It saved time and danger.

But it was of no use her watching the clock and doubling the time by her anxiety. Her impatience for the moon to rise had no result, for when the hour for going to bed arrived, Mona ordered her to her room.

But not to sleep! There was no sleep for that brisk, thinking brain. To remain for hours, with stretched neck and naked shoulders, leaning from her bed, listening to every sound, lest her mother should take the road to the mountains alone. "I'll follow her!" vowed Rosa Maria.

But the greatest noise that broke the quiet of the night was that of bolts being drawn and bars being placed, for Mona was very frightened of thieves. Curious instance that, of a robber guarding against robbers. She knew the trade too well to trust the fraternity. If good men were plundered, why not wicked women? Much knowledge led to little faith.

Mona's snore was like the roaring of a tide rising on a shingly beach, and Rosa Maria listened to it, until moonlight changed to the blue haze of morning, when, with her eyelids ajar, she dozed off to get strength for the coming day.

Early in the morning the renowned Paolo paid his wife a visit, and drank brandy by the fire-side whilst breakfast was preparing. He complained he was knocked up with a hard night's work.

Rosa Maria wanted him to stay more, but far from obliging her, he arranged himself full length on three chairs and went to sleep.

Instead of avoiding this vagabond, the girl now followed him as perseveringly as he had formerly chased her. Whilst Mona was away making purchases of food, the girl awoke him from his nap by shuffling her feet, hoping he might rouse up and talk. True he opened his eyes for a second, but the brandy

had made him more inclined for dozing than love-making.

When she subsequently upset a chair, he swore at her in a dreamy, foggy voice, but still with much power and fluency.

The girl, to save Alfred, had made up her mind that if Paolo choose to court her, she would let him chatter until all his secrets were betrayed. That is where these women have us in their power. It was a mean thing to do, but the necessity was urgent and her fears made her unscrupulous.

The quick-eyed villain, when awake, saw at half a glance that the girl's manner towards him was changed, and flattered himself that she was smitten with his huge gladiator's head. "They like us big men," he thought.

But Mona's two eyes were equal to any six ordinary optics, and flashed about him like swords, keeping such close watch on the wretch, that without a chance of pouring out his brandied breath in a love speech, the fellow had to return to his gang of rogues.

Bed-time was creeping on, and still Mona said nothing about carrying baskets and climbing hills. Have patience, Rosa Maria! don't look up at the clock every moment, but sit quietly like a little lady, for the good time is coming. Mona has no intention of letting you sleep in bed, whilst she is obliged to trudge abroad. You are the hag's apprentice, and must work at her trade.

When the hour of twelve strikes, she will go to the window and peep through the thick curtain, to see if the lights in the neighbours' houses are extinguished; and

then, fetching those heavy baskets, she will hang them on your arms, and make you trudge up the hills before her, like a well-laden, sure-footed mule. You will carry bread and water to the man you love best in the world, and good succulent meats and neat wines for the ruffians who persecute him.

Which of the two walked the faster on the way, the mother or daughter? You know. Her feet seemed to skate over the ground. Her legs were skittish and inclined to bolt. The old Mona, her fat cheeks shaking with her haste, and scarlet with heat, had to call out many times—"Curse the hussey! Are you running a race?"

Indeed she was; a race with villany, and a sweetheart's life was the sweepstakes.

Never had Mona done the journey to the prison so quickly. They have reached the clump of trees through which, when the wind is high and the branches blown back, the rock with the stout door is first visible.

"Is Alfred there? or is it some other unfortunate?" thinks Rosa Maria. Does that oak planking restrain her dear man? Has he been pushing against it with all his useless strength, and shaking it in the hopes of liberty?

Poor fellow! many a time has his eye been close against the small chink between the stout boards through which the daylight entered like a luminous slice, but all that he could distinguish were a few leaves waving within a foot of his prison.

Mona hunts under the napkin covering one of the baskets, and takes out a thick slice of dirty-looking bread. That is to be the supper of the Madam's pam-

pered son. Hard fare, that and water, but it is all he'll get. If ever he is free, it will be a treat to see him at a grilled chicken.

The key is turned and the thick door opens. Rosa's head stretches forward, but all within the cave is darkness, and Mona entering, seems to dive into the thick black and disappear.

"He lives! He lives!" cries the girl, her heart leaping in her bosom, and driving the blood at such speed that she feels blushing hot. To work she goes, praying furiously, her fingers moving among her beads quickly as those of a flute-player's doing variations. Each saint shall have twenty hymns of thanks, and, mind you, Messieurs Saints, sincere ones, worth the listening to. She vows she will kneel on the churchstones until the flesh shall grow horny as a hoof; she will do anything, anything! if her dear man is but spared.

Sometimes she almost loses her senses, and utters peevish, childish words that would be more like complaints than supplications, were they not so entirely earnest. "Sancta Maria, Queen of Mercy," she cries, "have compassion on a poor maiden! I love him so dearly! Mother of Virgins, give me grace to save his dear life! You know how good he is! Direct my limbs and strengthen my heart! I shall die, if he may not live!"

If she could by any means let him know that a faithful friend was near him planning his deliverance! How it would cheer him as he sits on the hard rock, dejected and hopeless. The moonbeams fall through the trees and form a bright patch facing the entrance to the cave. On tiptoe she creeps towards these

brilliant rays, so that, standing in them, she may illumine herself, and he, from within, distinguish her face and form.

Unfortunate Rosa! she fancied that her mother was the only one whose vigilance she had to elude. But the fierce passionate eyes of Paolo have been watching her as an owl does a mouse.

The bushes open, and a coarse hand, with dirty knuckles but fine rings on its fingers, clutches her arm. The Capitano has been as anxious for her visit to the mountains as she herself.

As he seized her arm he said in a hot whisper that blew warmly and left the steam on her cheek, "I am Paolo—hush."

Instead of hushing, she threw out a loud scream that must have made Alfred's breathing difficult.

The suspicious Mona in an instant rose to the black entrance of the cave, and stood there like an apparition, covering the pair with her fierce scowl.

"What is all this about?" she asked in a peculiarly spiteful tone, which implied she knew all about the business, but merely inquired into it in the hopes of detecting them in a lie. "Paolo, what are you doing to the girl?"

"Why do you keep me waiting all this time? Why can't you come earlier? Do you think I have nothing to do but attend your leisure?" was Paolo's indirect answer, for he knew the capital trick of putting off an accusation with a counter-grievance.

"You have no business here at all. Mind! mind! I caution you. It will be the worse for you, my man!"

There was no deceiving Madame Mona, she belonged to the Know-alls. The Capitano, infatuated by Rosa's conduct of the day before, had allowed himself to behave stupidly.

"No threats, old woman! that is my line of work," he replied savagely. Then tenderly he added, "What has ruffled my old hen? Mayn't I run after her if I like?" and he kissed her fat, drooping cheek, making her big ear-ring swing like a pendulum.

But what is a kiss to a jealous woman? She shook it off; and scowling at the pretty girl, ordered her to walk on before her.

At any other time the girl would have been frightened out of her wits by this scene, but now her only alarm was lest Mona might for the future dispense with her captivating presence to ensure the good behaviour of her husband.

Both women, as long as they were descending the heights, walked in silence. As they emerged into the plain blazing in the moonlight, Mona, now the footing was surer, recovered her tongue and asked, "What did he do?"

She told her the Capitano had seized her arm.

"Nonsense! stuff!" snarled Mona. "Don't fancy I shall believe you shriek because a man seizes your arm."

"I was afraid—he did it so suddenly."

"Don't lie to me, minx!" she growled. Presently she added, "Claudio, the miller from Ametia, says he will marry you. In a week you shall be off to him."

It occurred to Rosa Maria that it would be time

enough to object to this match when the week's reprieve had nearly expired. It would be bad policy to oppose her mother just then. Accordingly she replied with charming obedience, "I will do as you wish."

The old woman, who had drawn herself up into a stiff, stern, hard condition, was prepared for a scene; but on hearing the ready consent she let herself down again, and grew mild and peaceful.

Evidently the girl cared nothing for her Paolo. That was comforting.

Her voice altered to a kindly tone as she said, "Claudio is a good man, and able to keep a wife. His house is well furnished. You will like Ametia—it is a pretty town. Pay attention to me, child! until you are married, don't let me lose sight of you. Do you hear?"

This simple method of removing temptation from her darling but inconstant husband so delighted the woman that she became quite cheerful, and once—she was thinking how savage Paolo would be to find the girl gone—chuckled.

It was a good opportunity for Rosa Maria to talk about the prisoner's fate.

"He'll have his three days the same as the others," said Mona; "Bosco delivered the letters yesterday."

"Then one day has gone already," sighed the girl, endeavouring to her utmost to appear unconcerned. "Will the ransom be placed under the oak tree?"

"You'll know all about it when the time comes," answered the woman. "If you are a good girl, you

shall have the job of fetching the money. Don't bother now!"

She began to think Rosa liked their robbers' business.

From that moment Mona watched the girl as closely as if she had loved her child. When Paolo visited them, he failed miserably in his various schemes for distancing his wife; for wherever she went, Rosa obediently followed. He saw he was suspected, and sagaciously desisted lest he should spoil his future chances.

That night—after locking Rosa Maria securely in her room—Mona went her way alone to the mountains grumbling that brigands should have such appetites, and require such heavy baskets of food.

Poor caged Miss stared from her window and moaned. Her great hope now was, that the ransom would be forthcoming. She remembered all that Margaritta had told her of Alfred's expensive style of living—how he drank wines that lords only could afford, and every day eat a dinner fit for a wedding feast. Yes, he must be rich! But suppose his money has been exhausted by these luxuries? What then?

When another wretched day had passed and night had come, Mona directed the girl to go and fetch the money that would be sent to purchase her lover's life.

"The purse will be placed at the foot of the cross nearest to Nicti, the one at which the shepherds pray," the wretch said.

Now I can swear that when that outrageous villain,

Bosco, brought me the threatening letter so considerably worded by the Capitano, I rushed to the bank and presented the cheque Alfred sent me. I can swear I saw Bosco place the amount in his pocket, saying all would be well. I can also swear that though I waited breakfast for four hours, and had several jolly fellows to welcome Alfred back to safety, he never came, and with sorrowful hearts we were forced to sit down to table without him.

Most assuredly there was no purse under the cross. Bosco, the traitor, had gone by the first conveyance to Naples.

The girl panting with her run, for she had raced along like a mad thing, tore up the grass and scratched at the hard ground, but of course no money could she find. You would have thought she was dead had you seen her lying at the foot of that cross, curled up and motionless as if the body had been flung on the earth.

But the battle is not always to the strong. Rosa's brain was cleared of hope, and there was room for cunning to creep in. She would deceive these blood-thirsty wretches.

She rose, and entering Nieti, made for the house where Annitta lived. There she procured paper and pens, and disguising her writing, wrote, "The money will be forthcoming in three days." As she returned to the cottage, she did not forget to rub the clean paper on the ground, to give it a genuine look.

The innocent expression she put on as she handed the note to Mona would have deceived an Old Bailey jury.

"There was no money," she said, "only this writing. Is that what you expected?" Bless her dear face, Mona never suspected it.

"It's Paolo's business, not mine," answered Mona, "he can do as he likes. He will be here directly."

As neither of the worthy couple could read, the moment the Brigand entered, Rosa Maria was summoned to help them with her learning. She read her own writing with the clear voice of a parish clerk, and by leaning against the table, kept herself steady and firm.

The capitano scratched his head, and Mona, who was very fond of ready money, growled out that the whole affair had been mismanaged.

"How would you have done it better? Don't bully me, woman!" answered Paolo. "The letter was sent right enough. I myself saw the bankers' order placed in it, and Bosco promised to deliver it himself and bring back the answer."

"You and your Boscoss!" cried Mona. "What made you trust such a cowardly vagabond? I've no faith in a man that's frightened by a gun going off. Well, don't be all night making up your mind! shall you wait, or settle this Inglese at once?"

"It's a good sum of money," hesitated Paolo, "and a bit of bread doesn't cost much. It's worth the speculation. We'll wait."

It was a new life entering the girl's body, turning out the sorrows and fears of the old existence, and replacing them with fresh resolution and energy.

A great deal may be done in three days if the opportunity occurs for doing it; but when a girl is

locked up each night in her room, and watched by day so closely, she cannot raise an arm without the motion being noticed, I think I may assert that the chances of proving useful to a suffering fellow-mortal are considerably curtailed. Under such circumstances, five minutes are of about as much use as five thousand. So Rosa Maria, to her sorrow, found it.

At length the last day of the respite arrived. How many times had she vowed "to save him," and what was the end to be? She might well bury her head in her hands, and gasp as she pressed her temples. It was no use now staring before her like a mad woman, or throwing her arms about. The Inglese must die, unless he had the luck of ten men to shield him.

True, he was an artist, and they are hard to kill; but even they are not bullet proof, though they can live on less than a bird.

She was plunged in one of these despairing fits, when the door of her room opened, and Paolo entered. That foolish Mona had trusted him for a few minutes. He ran to Rosa Maria, and seizing her hand, began to devour it with kisses.

With all her strength the girl pushed him from her, crying, "Go, sir! go! Do you wish to bring upon me worse treatment than I now suffer? But for you, my mother would not treat me so cruelly, and I should still accompany her when she goes to the mountains." It was the luckiest speech she could have made.

He was a strong man, and though she struggled, had soon passed his arm round her waist. "So you like coming amongst us, do you, dear beauty?" he

said. "That is better than marrying Claudio, isn't it? Will you be our little queen, and keep house for us up yonder? If you could come to us alone, eh! alone, my darling!"

You wouldn't be long in freeing Alfred, then, would you, Rosa? When she looked up towards heaven, she meant to say as much. He fancied she was overcome with gratitude for the offer.

"I'll do it," cried Paolo. "You *shall* come alone. Without her! Do you understand? Without her!"

Even if she did not understand, Mona's sudden entrance stopped any chance of an explanation. Of all the chances that had as yet offered, this man's wicked love seemed the most certain.

To allow husband and wife to settle the matter to their fancy, she left them together the moment she was free to retire. In vain she waited to hear the loud dispute of Paolo insisting and Mona resisting. All remained quiet.

"He can manage her as he likes," she thought; "perhaps he has coaxed her into taking me with her."

Accepting this supposition as a settled fact, all her sorrows left her, and her head, lightened of the load of care, seemed to float lightly above her shoulders. It would be her death, but his liberty. She wondered whether he would ever hear that she died to save him.

Once, but only once, she began to think whether to die by the poignard would be a painful death. The only answer she found was, that it could not equal the pleasure of freeing her beloved.

She heard Paolo leave the house, and soon the voice of her mother called her. It wasn't to carry the

baskets though, but to clutch the girl by the shoulder, and shake her nails close to Rosa's white cheeks, as she called her "Devil!" and other bad names. "Don't think I'll take you," roared Mona. "Up stairs with you, to bed, you devil!"

The order was obeyed. The girl threw herself on her bed and felt hopeless, conquered, without courage, and ready to give up the struggle.

In this kind of trance she heard midnight strike, and Mona open and shut, as silently as she could, the entrance door. The garden gate creaked, and the footsteps crunching in the gravel died away, and yet, though she was repeating to herself over and over again, "She has started for the mountains without me," the girl could not move.

The last slice of bread Alfred would ever eat was on its way—the last night he would live was passing rapidly. It was the desire to see him once more before death that restored the use of her limbs.

She opened her window and dropped into the garden beneath. Then, with the speed of a flying thief, she sped after Mona. The old woman was far a-head, but so well did Rosa use her feet, that, before the base of the mountain was in sight, she could distinguish the white napkin covering the baskets. Nearer still, and then, panting, she followed discreetly.

Already Mona was pushing her way through the thick branches that overhung the mountain path, when Rosa beheld two forms rush from behind the dark bushes that edged the foot-way; a knife gleamed in the moonlight, and a shriek, that seemed to strike

her in the face and push her backwards, broke the silence of the night.

Rushing forward she found her mother lying on the ground bathed in blood, whilst the noise of cracking boughs followed the flight of the assassins.

The eyes of mother and child met: those of the one glittering with passion and hatred, those of the other filled with tears and compassion.

"Insolent devil," gasped Mona, "do you come to glory over my death?"

Had a little more strength been left in her, she would have clutched the throat she grasped at; but she was bleeding from twenty wounds, and had little power remaining, even for evil.

The child knelt by her, and raised her head, calling upon her tenderly to speak one kindly word at their long parting. But the mother's scowl and fierce eye stared up in answer, and looked curses, if she could speak none. So she died, leaving the world as she had lived in it—hating and doing wrong to everybody that lived within reach of her venom.

If a life was lost, yet there was one to be saved. From the hand, cold and tightly clasped in death, she released the prison key. She snatched up the long poignard lying at her mother's feet; and so bewildered as to be scarcely sensible of what had happened, she reached the prison in the rock.

In the darkest corner she finds Alfred, half torpid with cold and despair. She seizes his hand, and drags him towards the open door.

"I knew they would send the money," he stam-

mers out. She never thought to hear that voice again, and the sound brings back sense and feeling.

"I have come to save you," she says; "you must fly, or they will kill us both."

"Together," was his only answer.

I afterwards discovered that, within twenty minutes after the slaying of Mona, her disgusting husband, accompanied by some of his most desperate companions, called at the cottage for the purpose of carrying off the pretty Rosa Maria.

I consider the girl had a very narrow escape of it.

CHAPTER VI.

THE INCIDENTS WITH WHICH COMEDIES USUALLY FINISH.

IN justice to myself (a practice I highly approve of), I begin this chapter with wailings and pluckings of hair; or, in other words, I shall point out to my readers the many persecutions I have endured, and the very small indemnification that has been allotted me, as salve for my bruised heart and broken spirit.

I am an unlucky wretch, and full of woe. My whole life, since the pap-boat days of childhood, has been one long pathetic sigh for ease, plenty, and distinction; yet have I, beyond my lawful share, been overworked, despised, and starved. It strikes me that there must have been some cruel blunder about my birth—that I was destined to be the only and adored son of parents rich and noble. I feel I should have

made a capital duke. As it is, I am but an unpatronised artist.

There are some men, my dear friends, whose good fortune is so overpowering, that, on mere free trade principles, I object to the monopoly. These are the men whose guardian luck forces them to arrive too late for the train that rolls down the embankment; or makes them miss, by a few minutes, the vessel that sinks in mid-seas. These are the men that never want for money. Should they leave their purse at home, they have but to walk down the next street to find a sovereign on the pavement awaiting their convenience. Their tradesmen either give them everlasting credit, or should they presume to make out their bills, fire seizes on the shop, and destroys both the creditor and his books. These are the men whose aunts are continually dying, and leaving them large fortunes. They also marry the girls everybody else wants—beautiful rich creatures, who sob and pout if a word is said about a marriage settlement.

Such is the prosperity I thirst and hunger after; but though my tongue is hard and dry as a parrot's, though hunger gnaws at my stomach like a snake, yet the county court is my destiny, and hopeless insolvency my ultimatum. As my evil luck will have it, the artistic profession is almost the only one which does not encourage alms-houses for its destitute followers, probably from the conviction that the expense of supporting the entire talented body would fall too heavily on the few who succeed. Would that I had been a fishmonger or a butcher. I have seen their elegant red-brick charities, and immensely prefer them

to the ditch amid whose luxuriant nettles I shall lay me down, and whose tender leaves will rustle with my parting gasp.

I am in a desponding mood. The best chance that ever befell me of emancipating myself from the drudgery of a studio, was snatched from me by an Italian girl. I must either groan or burst.

I had reckoned on remaining my pupil's intimate friend, and prolonging his artistic education for some eight pleasant years. By carefully alluring him to exercise his impulsive habit of paying my bills, my calculations proved to a nicety that I should by that time become a man of capital, when, throwing off my serfdom as a painter of pictures, I should take to the more prosperous calling of dealing in them.

To my certain knowledge, that grasping villain, Ikey Dingles, has cleared thousands. I, like him, might have kept a gig and rented a Plantagenet Lodge. Now all the private property I possess in the world is a chair without a bottom. Confound the Muses! They live on Mount Workhouse; and as to the fine arts, what is there fine about them? Stuff! You may slave at your art till your fingers wither; but as they say in the police reports, "*The fine* not being forthcoming," you are condemned to hard labour and short diet for life.

The morning when Alfred, pale and haggard as a shipwrecked mariner, entered my room eyeing me like a dog that wants to fight; the morning when he rebuked me in harsh, short sentences, accusing me of being unfeeling, and of showing no more interest or energy in his behalf than if he had been mine enemy;

the morning when he did all this, I say, a child in long clothes might have knocked me over with one blow of its pretty little fist, for indignation always attacks at the knees and literally upsets me.

To rebuke *me!* his bosom companion! who had never closed his eyes at night without thinking of him; who never broke his fast without wondering if my friend would fare as well as I did. Had I not sent, per special messenger, the ransom-money he wrote for? Did I not wait breakfast for him until I was entirely exhausted? What the deuce did he call energy and interest if such self-sacrifices are to count for nothing. Some men are never contented!

During our angry recriminations, we for the first time became aware of the treachery of that scoundrel Bosco. That explained all, and restored our mutual confidence. He withdrew all his offensive expressions, and asked me which wine I preferred. I assured him I loved him rather better than my own mother, and called for a bottle of Château Lafitte.

He had plenty of news to tell me. I think he must have talked incessantly for three hours. His own sufferings did not occupy so much time as his panegyrics over the noble self-devotion of the heroic peasant girl. Whenever her name was mentioned, his eyes filled with tears, and his chin and lips began to work so that he could scarcely utter the praises and gratitude that almost made me envious to listen to.

Why, I thought, had not such a chance happened to me. How nobly the Madam would have rewarded me. As it was, I was most embarrassingly situated,

for I hate to see a man in tears, and all that was left to me to do was to fly to the bottle, and hide my confusion behind my raised glass.

Naturally enough I, from his troubled manner, concluded that Rosa Maria had fallen a victim to her overpowering love. "Poor girl!" I cried, raising my hands and shaking my head, "what will be her wretched lot!"

He stared at me rather hard, and muttered "Wretched lot!" as if surprised at the expression; then, quivering with enthusiasm, he said, "If the devotion of a lifetime, and the purest love a man can offer to a woman, will make her happy, that shall be her *blessed* lot!"

Then she wasn't dead! How fortunate I had not said anything against the woman. "Where is she?" I asked.

"With me, in Rome," he answered; "and when she leaves this city, it must be as my wife. As soon as she has sufficiently recovered, I shall prevail on her to join her destiny to mine."

Mercy on me! did my ears deceive me! Mona's daughter be turned into Mrs. Alfred Berthold! There was a rumpus brewing that would shake my fortunes to the foundation. I was too knowing to oppose him *then*, but I vowed that if I had any power over the simpleton I would save him.

So, to disguise my real feelings, I assumed an air of pleased wonder, and said, "When shall I have the pleasure of thanking this noble creature for preserving my dear friend's life?" It was settled I should dine with them on the morrow.

Directly he left me I began to plot. Should I write over to the Madam entreating her to hurry to Rome and save her child? The difficulty there was lest the old lady's view of the question should agree with Alfred's, and both of them fall upon poor me.

"No! the safer plan was to argue with the youth, and frighten him from this marriage. I would be cuttingly sarcastic, and indirectly, in fact almost as if I was encouraging the match, point out to him the certain disgrace that would follow his sentimental sacrifice.

Really I was charmed with the delicacy Alfred had shown in his behaviour to his future bride. They were at the best hotel in Rome, his rooms at one end of a long corridor, and the lady's at the other extremity. How the dickens he had managed to smuggle her into the house I couldn't imagine. Did he take her there in her peasant's costume? If so, he had more pluck than I possess, and it takes a good deal to abash me. Besides, it would ruin the house if such a thing were known, and for that reason they would refuse to admit her.

Perhaps he had, as they rode towards Rome, stopped at some ready-made clothing establishment, and made the necessary purchases. Even then, what consummate boldness a man must have to enter a shop and buy gowns and the other mysterious garments. Did she perform her toilet in the coach, he the while modestly leaning out of the window?

"By jingo," I said to myself, "there is a look of determination about all this which is evidently beyond my powers of sarcasm, or anything but bodily re-

straint." I began to tremble for my four hundred a-year.

If this fortunate girl had been born of a duchess mother, she could not have been more humoured or politely treated. Before he ventured to visit her, a servant was sent to inquire if it would be convenient to receive us.

I was almost disgusted at this absurd ceremony. Didn't I know all about her, and who she was? Hadn't I seen her selling fruit? Then, how preposterously stupid to make such a fuss over a simple interview with the wench. But I humoured his caprice, and checked my feelings.

I had no idea that dress could make such a difference in personal appearance until I stood before Rosa Maria. On my veracity, she looked a noble, elegant creature, who awed me into as much respect as if she had paid me to paint her portrait. There! She was superlatively lovely.

Dressed in a gown of black lace, that gave to her figure a luxurious softness of outline so pale that, as she lay upon the ottoman, with closed eyes, she looked like what the most vulgar undertaker would call a charming corpse. I almost felt that if Alfred should, at my suggestions, break off the match, I was capable of marrying her myself.

She was very weak, and scarcely able to answer Alfred's inquiries after her health. Even when he fastened to her dress the splendid diamond brooch he had that morning purchased, she had not power to thank him, but merely gave him a look of gratitude that took away my breath worse than a blow.

He must have spent a mint of money over her. There were rings on her fingers and rings in her ears, whilst around her full throat was a golden chain not thicker than a thread, to which hung an emerald cross that any time, was good for a year's food and shelter. As I watched that jewel rising and falling with the heaving of her bosom, like a little boat answering to the ripples of the tide, I could not resist saying to myself, "You've tumbled into a fine thing of it, my pretty miss! That fair face of yours has been a good friend to you." So it had.

The love-sick maudling conversation I had to listen to, and appear enchanted with, made the time pass drearily. "Was the perfume of the flowers too powerful for her? Should he remove them from the table?"

"No, signor," she replied, just opening for a second the transparent lid that fitted so smoothly over her blue eyes.

"You must not call me Signor," murmured the lover; I am Alfred—call me Alfred—your husband. Let me think you love me, Rosa."

A tear squeezed itself from under the lid, and made her long lashes cling together, whilst her lips trembled as if with cold. It struck me as downright cruelty to bother the girl, in her weak condition. Anybody could see she loved him, without forcing her to the exertion of saying so.

We dined in the lady's room, and a very sumptuous and gratifying repast it was, though, as Rosa Maria was too weak to wield her knife and fork, and Alfred too busy feeding her, to think of eating, I was left to help myself when, and as I choose.

I was indebted to the pretty girl for that delicious feast, for it was in honour to her that twelve courses and four different wines were served. I fancy I overate myself. But I was forced to do something to escape the monotony of my dear friend's affectionate nonsense.

The moment I saw him kneeling by her side, I attacked a dish or reached a bottle. His pathetic tone, as he entreated her, "to eat, if ever so little," seemed equally to apply to me, and spurred me on to repletion.

Not being able to light up my cigar in the presence of the prostrated lady, was the only drawback to the entertainment. It was in vain I reminded Alfred that Rosa was ordered by her medical attendant to be kept very quiet and free from excitement; it was in vain I warned him that he was killing her with his endearments; he wouldn't be advised, but remained seated by her side, now making her pillows soft,¹ or lifting up and replacing the powerless hand that slipped towards the ground.

All this time I had to remain as quiet as a thief, the only sounds that broke the silence being the grunts of ecstatic joy that Alfred indulged in whenever Rosa languidly opened her lovely eyes, or faintly smiled at him, or the rustling of her lace dress whenever she shifted her position. I preferred the rustling to the grunts, but above all, I should have preferred a cigar.

This excessive delicacy towards a girl who had been nurtured in thick clouds of tobacco smoke, struck me as downright Quixotism.

Love, too, did not appear to improve my friend's gentlemanly behaviour, for he even forgot to order coffee and cognac. I was obliged to leave the room, telling him he would find me below, in the street, smoking.

By and by he joined me. She had fallen in a calm sleep. He could leave her for half an hour. Did I not think her beautiful. Certainly I did—very beautiful.

Then gradually introducing the subject of his marriage, we, arm in arm, walked backwards and forwards, discussing the question—an excited gesticulating couple of fools; I for attempting to reason with a man mad with love; he for spurning the most convincing arguments a friend could bring to bear on his case.

I inquired when the ceremony was to take place. The answer was, so soon as Rosa Maria was strong enough to stand before an altar. "And," he added, "my only fear is lest her prostrated sinking condition should overcome the little strength left in her. If anything should happen to her I should die, I should, indeed! I do not simply love her, but her existence has become part and parcel of my own. She influences me almost to my breathing. As I sit by her side we can commune together in the spirit as easily as though we spoke. When I take her hand in mine I feel as if the current of her blood flowed into my body. Our lives have become as one and indivisible. She is the woman that a kind Heaven has decreed to be my wife. Bless her!"

I affirmed that he was a noble, impulsive, good

fellow, for I believe in the principle that you should never oppose a madman.

"You are talking nonsense," he answered, "there is no nobility or goodness in the matter. You view the case with cold, worldly eyes, as if a round sum of money would clear off my debt to Rosa Maria, and you also, though indirectly, hint that this marriage will be my disgrace. Now the gratitude and thanks are all on my side. How can you judge? You cannot understand the self-devotion, the charity, the piety, that have prompted every action of that noble creature's life. I don't ask her to be my wife simply because she saved my life, I do not wish to reduce our contract to a mere profit and loss transaction; to recompense her by giving her my name and a share of my fortune. I tell you I love her for her whole life, for her modesty, which even her brigand relatives could not shake, for the generosity which no fear could check, for the piety which, a few years back, would have made her a saint. She is so totally pure, and entirely good, that she becomes in my eyes a living poem; so womanly that each hour I tremble lest anything should stand between her perfection and my unworthiness."

That was outspoken enough, I thought. I admit the girl was a good amiable creature, but my dear friend was going a little too far in placing her on such an exalted perch. I told him I was merely doing my duty in warning him.

"No, my friend," he replied, "you were exceeding your duty, and reducing my conduct to your test of propriety and judgment. I fancy, my good fellow, I

have a higher notion of what is right than that which influences your behaviour."

"Come, now," I asked in a frank, open, jolly style, "Come, now, answer me this question. Supposing she had been an ugly, deformed, wretched creature, would you have married her then?"

There was no teaching him, so thick was his self-conceit. "Of what use," he replied, "to argue upon what might have been, since the facts are so very opposite."

"But merely for conversation sake," I argued. "Supposing this, how would you have acted?"

Instead of replying in a straightforward manner, he fenced me with another supposition. "Let us imagine," he said, "that her mother was a duchess and her father of the blood royal, and yet she had behaved towards me with the same nobility, would not you and the whole worldly crew rush to congratulate me upon my conquest? Would any of you hesitate to say that I ought to marry such a well-born lady? Still high birth would not in the slightest alter the merit of the action. On the contrary, the great surprise should be that one so humble, one so beset with temptations to evil, and goaded on as she was, should be capable of such charity and virtue. God bless her, and make me worthy to be her companion."

When a man is determined to be stubborn, I let him have his way. What business was it of mine if he chose to marry an apple woman, or any one else he had a fancy to? I took a different tack.

"Now look here, Alfred," I began. "I will admit that Rosa Maria is the most outrageously lovely

woman I have ever seen ; in fact, that either you must run away from her and blow your brains out, or make her Mrs. Berthold. I admit that her beauty is so excessive, that even if you intended any wrong it would protect her from your villany ; for the idea that you had no legal claim upon her sweet perfection, would drive you mad. But let me warn you in time. I suppose you know the kind of welcome the Madam will give your bride ?”

“ I shall keep the marriage secret until the proper moment for the revelation arrives,” was his defence.

“ Again,” I continued, “ all of us are more or less acted upon by the world’s praise or contempt.”

“ Stuff, do you think I care for the world ?” he sneeringly observed.

“ Of course you do,” I answered, “ everybody does. Why should you be an exception ? Disappointed mammas, who looked upon Alfred Berthold as a capital match for the Isabel’s and Leonora’s (two girls he had flirted with), will have no tender remarks to pass on your choice. All the pretty little misses who each in their turn have longed to have the Madam’s velvet-legged footman hovering about them will fight at you like spiteful kittens, and be especially bitter against your innocent little lady. Let Mrs. Alfred, to try them, call at their houses. John has been ordered to say that his mistress has left town. He will not know when she is to return, or where she has gone to. You may, if you look upwards at the house, catch sight of the cunning dowager eyeing you from the drawing-room window. It will soon take your romantic pluck out of you when you discover

that the woman you worship and esteem above all the vulgar world is treated with impatient harshness, and even undisguised contempt."

"How I do hate and loathe you mock morality humbugs," he cried, spitting as he spoke—not a very gentlemanly expression of disgust, to say the least of it. "How you howl and rave over your prayers and extol the written morality; but the moment the chance comes of practising your duties, how you all turn away and rush back to your selfishness. I tell you I do not care *that* (snapping his fingers), for your dowagers or pretty little misses. I tell you, there are higher rewards to comfort me than your drawing-room philosophy is capable of imagining. Pray let the matter drop, for every blow you aim at me only tightens the nails that fix me to my resolves. We have argued sufficiently."

My look out for the future seemed gloomy enough, and there was a sorrowful disappointed tone in my voice as I said, "Very well, as you like, old boy. Let us go back to England; I to slave, you to revel in happiness. I suppose you will not require my services when we reach the home-land, it will be good-bye and God bless you, then."

The answer he gave simply relieved me of tons of care. "I see no reason why we should separate unless you wish it," he replied. "I shall require your assistance just the same, whether I am married or not. In fact," he added confidentially, "I intend to keep my marriage a secret from the Madam until—until—indeed, she will only hear of it when I am a father. The sight of my child, if I am so blessed,

will soften her heart; for she is a good woman, and loves me greatly. She has proved that many times. And look here, old boy," he added, "you must not betray me."

Then he seemed to be turning over something in his mind. I was silent too. Presently he added, "You know I am not so rich now as I shall be, but would three hundred pounds be of any use to you?"

"My dear friend!" I cried, really hurt, "do you mean that as a bribe?"

"Of course I do," he returned, laughing. "The Madam must know nothing of my marriage for a year at least; and if you can keep your tongue quiet for these twelve months, the three hundred shall be yours. But mind, this gift will not interfere with your regular engagement."

You see I was very poor; I have nobody but myself to depend upon. I certainly had my scruples about taking this money, but the objections were very small and feeble ones. I tried to struggle with myself, but it was a useless fight, and I felt I must give way. When I cried out, "For shame, Alfred!" my voice, instead of being honestly vigorous, was weak and yielding.

I think if he had offered me five pounds I could have been upright and indignant. But three hundred, oh! For delicacy's sake I allowed him to press his offer a *leettle*, and then shaking his hand, I told him I had done nothing to merit such kindness; but since he insisted upon being generous, it should be a bargain.

I wasn't quite easy in my mind, though. It was

rather mean of me, don't you think so? But three hundred pounds, my boys! eh? Isn't it a bagful! eh?

How could I refuse my loving aid to such a man, so noble in his ideas, and so generous with his coin? I should have been a brute, and imprudent beyond my position to thwart him.

He said I was his "dear old Tom,"* when I volunteered to make all the necessary arrangements for his marriage. I had to call upon the clergymen, both Protestant and Catholic (for, on account of Rosa's religious scruples, a double ceremony was necessary). I had even to order the breakfast, which Alfred, like a true Briton, insisted should await our return from church.

That breakfast I shall always consider to be my greatest gastronomic achievement. To this day, when my penny loaf seems dry, I recall the flavour of those ortolans, and the bread eats with a gamey relish.

The night before the wedding was to take place, Alfred, for the first time, informed Rosa that everything was prepared for their union, and implored her consent.

Her health was very much improved, owing no doubt to a generous and varied diet. Our expenses were over six pounds per diem, and I cannot imagine anybody living at that rate and being ill. She ought to have been strong enough to go through twenty marriages had they been necessary

* I had forgotten to state that my name is Thomas Eyle, and that Augustus Mayhew, if he had any sense of delicacy, should have long since mentioned that circumstance.

Now I am thoroughly convinced that Rosa was a noble, high-minded creature. Judge for yourselves.

I was asked by Alfred to remain in the corridor whilst he entered Rosa's apartments to break the marriage question to her. I walked up and down for about half an hour, wishing to goodness he would make haste and get the matter settled—for it was lonely—when out he came, with his handkerchief to his eyes, sobbing like a big booby.

All I could get from him, as he dashed about stamping and beating the air with his fists, was, "Dear girl! noble angel! go and speak to her, darling child!"

So I entered the room, and sat down by the sofa on which, huddled up in a corner, crouched Rosa Maria, her head buried in her arms.

She, too, was in tears.

I thought to myself, "This looks like a merry wedding, doesn't it?" Her hair was all rumped, and her dress in great disorder. So absorbed was she in her trouble, she evidently forgot I could see more of her foot and ankle than was strictly right. Finer specimens I have seldom contemplated.

"Why are you weeping?" I asked very tenderly. "Alfred, too, is in great distress. I hope you have not quarrelled."

She shook her head in reply.

"Do you not wish to be his wife?" I continued.

The head was again shaken.

"He loves you, and would, I think—yes, I am nearly certain—be kind to you, Rosa." I never like to speak too sanguinely in such matters.

She turned round to me with unexpected vivacity, causing me to fall back smartly to a safe distance. "He loves me," she cried, "yes, I know he loves me, for he wishes to ruin himself for my sake. But I love him too—oh! yes, very much; indeed, I do not mind what I suffer, if he can be persuaded to be reasonable and prudent."

Whilst she tried to check her sobbing, I said, "How foolish you both are! You worship one another till you are both silly, and yet when the moment comes for completing your happiness, you allow this sentimental nonsense to interfere with the blessed opportunity. Why, Rosa, this love which torments you both is the very strongest, the only religious motive why you should be united as soon as possible. You stupid child! you ought to dance for joy, to get such a man."

You see, I spoke to her as if she were a little child. I considered it a proper case for coaxing more than arguments.

She looked up and said, "I am a poor girl! he is a rich gentleman. I should disgrace him. His friends would laugh at him for marrying the Italian woman. In time he would hate me. Is it not better to part now, whilst we are filled with tenderness for each other. Oh! yes, much better. How would his mother receive him when he showed her the ignorant rustic girl he had married in the distant country, Would she not say I had inveigled him into ruin?"

There seemed a fair chance of my three hundred pounds slipping through my fingers. It was no time for hesitating. I saw at once I must speak up for the

Madam, and make her out to be motherly perfection and tenderness. "Bless me, Rosa," I said, smiling, "How could such queer fancies creep into your pretty little head? You little know the kind of woman who is to be mamma-in-law. A good merry dear soul as ever lived. The moment she sees your blue eyes and beautiful hair, she'll hug you to her bosom and bless you. Didn't you save her Alfred's life? Of course you did! The idea of your being afraid of the Madam—silly child."

I was glad to see that she had left off sobbing, and was staring at me with suspecting wonder.

After a little hesitation she said, "We believe in Italy that all you English are proud and cold, and look down upon such as I am, as only fit to be servants. It would break my heart if Alfred should be despised through me."

"My good girl," I answered, laughing, as if she had spoken the greatest nonsense, "where did you pick up these queer fancies? We English proud! Well, that is a good one! you strange little thing! Why, it is well known that, taken as a nation, a more charitable, humble, sympathetic set of men do not exist. You won't believe me, I dare say, when I assure you, that it is quite a common event for a nobleman to marry his housekeeper, and as for our judges, they have a positive mania for courting their cooks. No, my dear, we consider that a true-hearted, virtuous girl is a fitting mate for the highest lord in the land. We have a saying amongst us, that the wife is always equal to the husband; I can assure you it is true. The only thing we really despise is, when

a man marries a woman for her fortune. He is cut directly by all his friends, and is generally obliged to leave the country."

I believe I am to this day sometimes punished for that lie.

During this long speech I kept my face so solemn that the poor girl was obliged to believe me. As she still hesitated, I went to the door and beckoned to Alfred.

In he rushed, down at her feet he fell, and before ten minutes both were in paroxysms of such superlative happiness that, not being in love myself, I couldn't stand their absurdities, but leant out of window to take the air, until their senses returned.

The diamond ring Alfred presented to me, in acknowledgment of this service, was at any time worth eight sovereigns, and was, within a year or two, still in my possession.

Well, my dear friends, we went to church. We preferred setting forth on our holy undertaking at an early hour, before the streets were crowded; and our toilettes were excessively simple—in fact, a mere *costume de promenade*. No carriages, no orange flowers and white satin favours; merely a street vehicle and white kids. In fact, we sneaked into the sacred building as if we were afraid of being seen and sent home again.

I gave away Rosa Maria with much fatherly grace. But there are one or two little accidents which interfered with the order of the ceremony, upon which I should much like to have your opinions, my dear friends.

I am not a superstitious man, neither am I subject to optical delusions, or fits of nervousness; indeed, I am as sane and stolid a mortal as ever lived. The darkest night does not frighten me, and I can pass through a churchyard without looking over my shoulder. As to spilling salt, seeing three crows, hearing a dog howl, being suddenly pestered by mice, or breaking a looking-glass; I term these events mere human inconveniences. I replace the salt, I wish I could shoot the crows, I long to beat the dog, I set traps for the mice, and if I can afford the money, I buy a new looking-glass, and if I cannot, I shave at the largest of the broken pieces. Such is my matter-of-fact nature.

To be sure I once saw a ghost, but then it was a very small one, only a hand with the thumb cut off, and an antibilious pill sent off that apparition as effectually as cock-crow.

To be short, I don't believe in signs and spectres. The only night visitors I am afraid of are thieves, and that is why I look under my bed every night.

But what are your opinions, my dear friends, of accidents that occur on a wedding-day, and during the ceremony too? I plainly confess I do not like them. They *do* seem to be sent as warnings; don't you think so?

Now, as we were standing before the altar, the foolish old woman who opens the pews—a wrinkled, sour-faced, trembling crone—wishing, perhaps, to coax a few coins from the bridegroom's pocket, insisted on joining in the responses, and startling us by the intense fervour of her manner. The old

thing seemed to pray more lustily than all of us put together.

When that part of the ceremony arrived when we had to kneel, nobody can thoroughly imagine my disgust at seeing this sour-faced old pew-opener actually place herself between Alfred and Rosa Maria.

I hissed at her to attract her notice, and made signs for her to fall further back; but there she stuck as if she meant it. The clergyman had to address her, saying, "My good woman, you are separating man and wife," before she would shuffle into a respectful distance. Upon my word, my blood ran cold with a kind of warning terror.

Then again, Alfred, being full of romance and love, had no spare room in his brain for common sense, and had brought no ring with him. The service had to be delayed some twenty minutes, whilst I rushed off to purchase one.

Then, again, as we returned home in our hack carriage, the old horse took it into his head to fall down. The consequence was, we had to alight and walk back to our hotel.

You will not get me to believe that these omens were without some special reason. I only know this, that if, on the eventful day when I lead the intended Mrs. Eyle to the altar, anything of the kind happens to me, I shall pack the lady, whoever she may be, back to her mother, and she may lay her damages at thousands if she thinks the law can make me pay such a fabulous sum. I say again, I do not like omens inside a church.

I will merely add, that the wedding breakfast was

a perfect and long-drawn-out beauty. The bride eat I think about as much as a mouse could have managed; Alfred soiled his fork for form's sake; but I, being free of stuff o' nonsense, set to with a judicious temperate strength, having calculated to a crumb the exact amount of food a man, with so many rare dishes before him, can partake of, and yet taste of each dainty.

All the wines were good.

CHAPTER VII.

FULL OF CHARMING EXAMPLES OF RABID LOVE.

OH! so happy! so completely happy!—both of them, poor things—he such a devoted husband, she such a perfect amiable wife.

To any one fond of such delicious scenes of intoxicating domestic bliss, it would have been a great treat to watch this affectionate couple. They quite forgot the earth and its inhabitants. They even forgot *me*. With pain I write it; my society was no longer wanted. I was neglected—treated with rude oblivion! in fact, it was evident I was in the way. After all I had done to help them both! Dear! dear! It is a funny world.

Often did I meet the waiter carrying to Madam's apartments elegant little luncheons, but no invitation came for *me*, though they must have heard me whistling in the passage.

I was requested not to wait breakfast or dinner

for them, which meant I was to live at my own expense on such food as I could afford, whilst they sat down to positive feasts. Is it then to be wondered at that I did all I could to awaken them from their dreams of bliss, and humanise this selfish couple

I allowed them a honey-moon of three days.

To be candid, I was in a highly nervous condition lest that unmitigated scoundrel the Capitano Paolo, should pounce down upon us. Such a rogue could have no sense of justice, and was just as likely to attack me as Alfred. I will admit that I was afraid to venture into the streets after dark. I fully expected the villain would creep up behind me and slash away at my poor back.

It became evident that unless I could get these lovers away from Italy, my health would suffer. I began to burn night-lights. I fancied I saw crouching forms in all dark corners, and trembled if my curtains moved in the draught from the windows. My only object in visiting Rome was, of course, to amuse myself, so why stay there to be miserable.

I hit upon a very clever scheme for effecting my purpose. I sent for Alfred and told him putting on a look of great fear, that I had been followed all day long by a fellow in a thick cloak, who, however, much I tried to escape him, stuck to me like a shadow. I pretended that this fellow was the bandit captain.

He wanted to know what the man's face was like, but I escaped the difficulty by saying that his features were concealed under the broad rim of his hat. The moment Alfred appeared alarmed, I warned him of Paolo's only object in coming to Rome, namely, to

avenge himself on the lovely Rosa ; and I entreated him, for her sake, to fly Italy.

Leaving him to his thoughts, I next sought out the lady, and, after favouring her with the very same story, I implored her, unless she wished to see Alfred fall a victim to the robber's jealousy, to make for Paris (I had not seen that elegant city) with all speed. The next day we started.

And a very insipid journey I had. I made up my mind at the time that nothing on earth should again induce me to travel with a sentimental love-sick couple. Such pretty attentions, so tender and useless. They were not comfortable unless they were holding each other's dear hand.

It positively disgusted me to notice the way in which they would stare into one another's eyes for half an hour at a stretch. The people on the steamer must have laughed at them. Every puff of wind was an excuse for arranging dear Rosa's shawls and cloaks. His inquiries after her health nearly made me feel ill, and as he asked her about every two minutes whether she was fatigued, the wonder is how she found the strength to answer him.

Their greatest enjoyment was to creep into some secluded corner where she could rest her head on his shoulder, whilst he supported her with his arm round her waist. If ever I approached them, it amused me wonderfully to see the earnest important way in which he ordered me not to speak or make the least noise for fear of disturbing his darling's slumbers. I wonder he didn't insist upon having the engines muffled.

I left them to their own ideas of enjoyment, and

delivered myself up to hearty feeding and strengthening nature with copious refreshments.

The worst of these sweet lovers is their unbounded selfishness. By Jingo, sir, they'll work you like a footman if you are fool enough to give their whims full scope. Whilst that lazy Alfred was simpering with his adored, I was made to look after the luggage, rush about for carriages, engage apartments, cheapen bills, or abuse porters, carry trunks, and, in fact do a courier's duty, whilst he, when my labours were ended, stepped into the comfort, and never turned a hair with the slightest exertion.

But mark me, though I slaved, I was not to enjoy myself. I must give up all my pleasures. My cigar oppressed dear Rosa. My glass of grog was unpoetical and offensive. My chair must be pushed back that the darling's couch might be nearer the fire. When the train arrived at a station I must sacrifice my miserable five minutes, the only opportunity I might have perhaps for hours of restoring my system with a few creature comforts, that I might dance attendance on the interesting pair, fetching for them fruits, cakes, or other delicate lovers' food; and, as a climax, I was asked to carry shawls! I was also expected to imitate his tenderness and anxiety, and put on a despairing look if Rosa was pale, or appear distracted—if Rosa could not eat her dinner.—Rubbish! the girl was as strong as I was, and to make such an absurd fuss about her was most ridiculous and insulting—especially as I knew all about her private history.

I so lost my patience with them, that the moment we reached Paris, I left them to enjoy themselves

after their own moony, lackadaisical fashion, and excepting at dinner-time never bothered them with my society.

The cafés, the public gardens, the picture galleries, were more to my taste than their insipid fondling. I preferred studying French life and character as seen on the Boulevards. Under the cool awning of the café, with my small decanter of excellent brandy by my side, and plenty of iced water within reach, I, as I smoked a big but pleasantly soft cigar, took notes of that amusing and strange people.

Or amid the fairy groves of the gardens of Mabilly, or the illuminated walks of the Château des Fleurs, I sauntered about hunting for character. I philosophised over the nation. Their wines I like and their boots are excellent.

The cooking is agreeable, but too easily digested for a man of limited means.

As the time drew near for our starting for London, I noticed that Alfred's high spirits left him, and the calm contented expression of the happy lover was changed into the unmistakeably anxious look of a man in difficulties.

Poor boy! I could follow every thought that passed through his brain. As he sat examining his nails and biting his lips, I knew why he frowned and fidgetted. He would soon have to face the terrible Madam, and render up the account of his past conduct. That little interview would have to be endured.

How was he to break to her the news that he had brought home with him a Mrs. Alfred? It was, to be frank, a dangerous and bothering undertaking. I

could see he was dying to consult me, but was too proud to acknowledge himself afraid of the old lady; or confess that he had behaved recklessly in taking unto himself a wife.

How he did sneak around me to be sure, and pet and coax before he could take me into his confidence. He bought me a handsome box for my cigars, and a very elegant watch-chain and charms. It was like old times come again.

Could I help giving way before such expensive attentions? I am human, my dear friends. It was finally agreed that on a certain morning we were to leave Rosa at home, and breakfast together. Not one of your dry toast and weak tea meals, but a noble one o'clock repast, at an open window of the café Riche, with oysters and chablis, with meats made aromatic with truffles and wines that perfumed the air. I had the ordering of that breakfast, and trust me, when money is no object, which means when I do not pay the bill, for ferreting out a delicacy.

He watched my face until he saw it completely under the influence of the rapturous diet, and then, after beating about the bush a little, he introduced the subject for my consideration.

We should soon be back in London, he said, in just such a tone as men assume when they talk about bills falling due.

I answered, "Yes, confound it," or something to that effect, for I was merely a passive listener waiting for the facts of the case to be stated.

"I wonder if the Madam will be glad to see me," he pensively remarked.

"Of course she will! She dotes on *you*," I replied, with pointed emphasis on the "*you*."

That made him cough. "Do you mean she will behave rudely to Rosa?" he asked.

"My good Alfred," I said, laughing, "who ever said the Madam would or could behave rudely? It isn't in her. But she'll be so brutally civil, the poor girl's heart will break."

"Don't you think Rosa's pretty face will melt the old lady?" he inquired, "when I tell her I owe my life to that lovely creature, don't you think her motherly gratitude will pardon my little wife's humble descent?"

Who could help smiling? "Dear old enthusiastic fellow," I cried, "you judge all the world by your own generous impulses. If you were to plead your case before a jury of men, no doubt Mrs. Berthold's heavenly countenance would ensure you a favourable verdict. But what do old ladies care for pretty faces? They stick out for noble descents—the fine rich scrofulous old English blood. Your wife might have been small-poxed, her face might be dented like an old warming-pan, so long as her settlements were satisfactory, and she could brag of a duchess in her back generations."

"You are making out my mother to be simply a fool," he objected.

"If I am, I make a great mistake then," I answered. "She is the shrewdest, cleverest party I know. All I try to prove is, that she will not go into raptures when you introduce her to Mrs. Alfred."

That was pat and downright. He turned white, and began to roll up his bread into pellets. "What do you think I had better do?" was the next question.

I knew what he wanted me to say, so I said it. "If I were you," I advised him, "I should keep my marriage secret for a little time, and by degrees break it to the Madam. See if you cannot fall dangerously ill, and confess to her on your sick-bed; or threaten to blow your brains out, if you like. That is the easiest method I can think of for extorting her forgiveness."

He drew himself up grandly, and said, in an insulted voice, "You talk as if I were ashamed of my wife, sir."

I shrugged my shoulders, as much as to say, "You know what I mean."

After a moment's silence, I added, "If you prefer it, you can go upon the other tack, and defy the consequences. I dare say the Madam will rave a little, but she must give way after a time, I suppose; she may refuse to see your wife to her dying hour, and that sort of thing. If I were you, I tell you frankly, I should manœuvre and trust to art."

He saw it was no use trying to deceive me, and growing calm, he said, as if addressing his wife, "Unfortunate girl, I am afraid I have dragged her into misery. It will break her heart if my mother should receive her unkindly. You see, old boy, I very foolishly deceived my Rosa as to the Madam's character. I made out that the fondest welcome awaited her at our house. It's awkward, isn't it? What shall we do?"

I thought it would come to that, "What shall *we* do?" WE! As if I had anything to care for. She wasn't my wife! I hadn't married a fruit girl! Yet, if any dirty work was to be done, I must be dragged into the job. Well, well! I never could refuse a helping hand. I undertook to break the evil tidings to Rosa and manage for the best.

She had noticed that Alfred was dejected, and had been wondering for the reason. The instant I touched upon the matter she bristled up, and became all curiosity and attention.

I merely enlightened her as to the kind of lady she had for a mother-in-law, observing that she was the proudest, most offensive, and absurd old woman I had ever tried to avoid, and warned her that she must prepare for a terrible scene when she arrived in London. Instead of replying, she settled into a sulky silence. Not a word did she utter beyond "My poor husband." So I left off.

Presently Alfred entered. When he stooped down to kiss her forehead, she took his head between her little hands and forced him to kneel by her side.

Whilst caressing him, and pushing the thick hair from his temples, she began to whimper and sigh, and call him her "generous, good husband." Why had he deceived her? Why had he not told her the truth? Was it not cruel to force her to be her dear Alfred's ruin! Oh! that she was dead. But she would die! Yes, her Alfred should be free, and no longer be afraid to meet his mother, because of the poor Italian girl that loved him.

It was a wonder he did not suffocate Rosa, for he

put his hand before her mouth to prevent her reproaching him, all the while pressing her to his bosom with his powerful arm. "Pure, beautiful angel," he cried, "I love you better than all—mother, friends, everybody. I did deceive you, or rather I deceived myself. I imagined nobody could see your pretty face and blame me for my love. But we will find courage to face all our troubles. You are my dear wife, and that is all I want to make me happy. I was frightened lest they should say cruel things to you, dearest, and pain you, darling. I was a coward and mean. I wished to prepare the way before I said to my mother, 'I have a wife.'"

"What need is there to say so at all?" was her simple reply. She was a wonderfully natural obedient child.

Alfred was taken aback. He did not see me making signs to him to close the bargain. He seemed ashamed and crest-fallen. "My wife must be acknowledged openly, and share with me for good or evil. I must not treat her as if I was ashamed of her, and repented my choice," he answered.

I could have flogged him.

"Why distress your mother for such selfish reasons," she rejoined; "we are married, are we not? We know it, God knows it; what further testimony do we require?"

Thus did this singular creature argue against herself, persuading us into keeping the marriage secret. Alfred wept over her, and called her by every flattering name he could think of; and vowed that before a month was over, his mother should herself fetch her

in the grand state family coach, and escort her to the family drawing-room.

I rejoiced mightily in the settlement of this vexatious question, for most certainly I should have had notice to quit had this confounded marriage come suddenly to the Madam's ears.

The next question for private discussion between myself and Alfred was, what was to be done with Rosa during her concealment?

Now I have an uncle, a worthy and fine-looking man (if he would shave oftener), of limited income, but extended liabilities, who lives at St. John's Wood, where he carries on the business of a coal agent.

He is also connected with the Corn Market when he gets orders.

His office is on one side of the house, and was, I am told, formerly the scullery. According to his brass plate, he is also agent for three Life Insurance Companies.

But despite the number of irons he keeps in the fire, I doubt if he makes a very good thing out of his profession. I know the milkman was saucy the day I took tea with them. Besides, his office bell is broken; the almanac over the fire-place is five years old, and he has burnt up all the samples of coal blocks left with him for exhibition.

His name is Sadgrove—Jabez Sadgrove—a name which, in the city, I believe, is not much respected, commercially speaking.

This uncle once lent me his name in a bill transaction, and I owed him a good turn. His drawing-rooms had never been furnished, and it occurred to

me that Rosa would make a profitable lodger. My aunt Ruth was a good careful body, with a bleak nose, and long wrinkled throat, who was well able to protect the lovely girl, if any impertinent wretch should dare annoy her first floor lodger. I pointed out to Alfred all the advantages of such a home for his wife. How secluded ! How quiet ! How nicely everything could be arranged !

I took him to my uncle's, and introduced him to my aunt, and he was shown the drawing-room. He did not seem favourably disposed towards either the dwelling or my relations.

I will admit the house was a little out of order. The want of oilcloth in the passage, and the absence of carpeting on the stairs, the wonderful accumulation of dirty marks around the door handles, coupled with the fact of a few of the bannister rails being missing, to say nothing of the wild, uncultivated condition of both front and back garden, or the greenhouse being in ruins, gave a dissolute, insolvent appearance to the otherwise desirable residence.

He declined to take the apartments, saying, that for the present he intended staying at some family hotel.

So we tried the hotel. A room was engaged for me as a sort of companion to the little wife. She had a splendid suite of rooms. He informed the landlord that the lady was his wife, and tried to explain that his business would very often take him away from her society ; indeed, he entered into a variety of particulars which would have been much better left unsaid, for they only excited suspicion and mistrust.

It was thoroughly stupid and thoughtlessly absurd to touch upon the matter at all, considering that Alfred Berthold was well remembered by every waiter in the establishment as one of the richest and wildest young fellows about town, and the story of the lovely Italian wife was, to their fancy, too old a trick for them to believe it.

The landlady was almost rude to us the very first time we had occasion to speak with her.

The result was, the mistress talked scandal, and told her husband her house would lose its character; the waiters chatted with the dashing young fellows who had seen the pretty Rosa at her window, and had a thousand questions to ask concerning her.

There was a vast deal of looking very knowing, and saying mysterious things. My good little Rosa's character had to suffer from many unkind and vulgar insinuations. Indeed, every gentleman of any pretension about the house, became inspired with a desire to carry off the beauty. The ignoble idiots began to smoke their cigars, walking up and down the pavement facing our apartments. If I scowled at them, they stared back at me with the greatest unconcern.

The moment the rooms adjoining ours were unoccupied, a fellow with a pretty lady-like moustache took them and passed the day lolling from his windows staring towards our balcony, in the hopes that Rosa's head might peep forth.

Directly our door opened he rushed to his; and many a time did we stand face to face, I in a frenzy of indignation, he scanning me with the coolest and most consummate impudence. It was a delicate matter to

mention to Alfred, and I held back as long as I could. For my life I dare not quit the girl.

By degrees the news got into the club-rooms that Alfred Berthold had returned to England, bringing with him the prettiest creature it was possible to conceive. The rheumatic old beaux, the gouty wine-soaked old lady-killers, when they met Alfred began to joke him about his "little tots" and "pretty puss;" trying to drag him out, and induce him to brag (as they would have done).

But he frowned them down, and then escaped from their cross-examinations. Once, in his indignation, he had the courage to assert to a gay old rip who was joking him that the lady in question was his wife; but the remark was received by the dashing Methuselah with shouts of laughter, and it was agreed that Berthold was a confoundedly knowing fox, and as jealous as a Turk.

It ended by the listless, neatly got up dandy in the next room taking it into his head to rap at our wall, and sing Italian love songs outside our door. One day, Alfred had the honour of listening to the serenade. There was no mistake about the fellow's intentions; for he had wormed out from the chamber maid or somebody else that the stranger's name was Rosa, and he used it at the end of every line in the poem.

My dear Alfred sprang from his chair a steam-engine of boiling rage, and before I could stop him he was driving the minstrel before him in unmistakable flight.

Then came the hubbub—a regular scene. He re-

requested an instant interview with the landlord, and had the double honour of meeting the landlady as well as the lord.

Very much excited, he requested to be informed how it was that a lady staying at the hotel was subjected to the drunken insults of the other inmates.

The landlady, a very fierce female, smiled when Alfred called dear Rosa "a lady." She further added that if ladies chose to encourage the attentions of strange gentlemen they had nothing to complain of, that she could see. She accused the dear girl of passing hours with her head out of window for the men to stare at her; and when Alfred stormed and raved she dared him to show his marriage certificate, dared him to take his "wife" to his mother's house, and wound up by ordering him to leave the hotel on the morrow.

My good Alfred—brave, generous friend—would I had been there to help you. He limped back to our room a broken hearted, spiritless man. When Rosa kissed him, and inquired why he looked so pale and sighed so mournfully, he looked sadly into her beautiful face, and asked her to forgive him the great injury he had caused her.

The dear boy's voice trembled, and he spoke with a thick tongue as he told her he had been a coward not to acknowledge before men that which he had not feared to do before his God. And now, he told her, he was being punished for his weakness, until his heart was sore and well nigh broken.

It moved me very much to listen to him, there was such melancholy and contrite earnestness in his

words. It fastened my love to him with a strong double knot.

We left that hotel, and tried another. For a time we lived in peace, and quietly enjoyed ourselves. He never left his bride for longer than an hour or so. He became more affectionate than ever, and as tenderly careful of her comforts as if he had been nursing her back to health after a long sickness.

Good little girl that she was. Though he kept her almost a prisoner in her room she never once grumbled, or longed to go shopping and sight-seeing. It was not from jealousy that he shut her up though it looked like it, but from a dread of her meeting with insult.

Occasionally at twilight he would take her for a stroll, her face hidden under a heavy lace veil; but all the time he was in a state of great anxiety, and looked about him to see if they were followed. Indeed he gave me the notion that he expected insults, and was prepared to punish them.

Sometimes he would say to me, "I wish Rosa was not so pretty; I am sure I should love her as well, and what uneasiness we should both escape."

To which I usually replied, "Stupid man! Because everybody thinks you the luckiest fellow in the world, you actually want to throw away your treasure. Why complain because Rosa is Rosa?"

Whilst Alfred was leading this retired hotel existence, the Madam fired up with indignation that after his long absence on the Continent her son should so soon desert her. The first time Alfred went to his club he found five scolding letters awaiting him, each

more and more violent than the preceding one; so that the last effusion was dangerous to read, so explosive were the angry reproaches.

The old lady had been puzzling her clever head to account for her son's laches. She instinctively came to the conclusion that he must be under the fascinating influence of some evil woman, who lured him from his duties. (Unfortunate little wife, that was the way she spoke of you!) If she met any friend the first question she put was, whether he could give her any news "of her naughty boy?"

But although the story of the pretty Italian girl was very generally known by both the men and women of the Berthold set, yet nobody had the courage to repeat the scandal to the mother.

Men had joked and laughed together at the club, and wondered whether the girl was really as pretty as report made her out. They did not talk very respectfully of "the Italian woman" either; certainly not in such delicate language as Alfred would have wished to be used, when his wife was the subject for discussion.

Some of these gay old clubmen were married, and it was not very long before they told the event to their wives, and so the scandal spread among the women. Then not a visit was paid by these fashionable ladies, but nearly the first phrase was if "my dear had heard about Alfred Berthold and that horrid foreign creature?"

Some tittered; others—those who had daughters—held up their hands in horror, and said it was a pity he was not married and settled. So it had happened

that nearly a thousand tongues were abusing this most innocent little Rosa, before mamma was allowed to add her outcries to the general chorus.

She smiled very blandly, when her turn at last came to listen to the slander, and appeared to treat the occurrence as a very ordinary event in a fashionable young gentleman's town life, saying Alfred was a wicked boy, and she would scold him; and she trusted he would recover his wits some day, and repent of his sad behaviour.

But at heart she was bubbling, boiling, and fuming. She would have given a handful of sovereigns to have learnt her son's hiding-place, and to have been able to dash in upon him as he sat fondling his deary, and abash the jade to the very ground by flashing upon her a piercing look from her bright cruel eyes.

Yet there was not a more virtuous woman in Europe than my gentle good Rosa, nor one less able to bear the evil words that were hourly aimed at her pretty head.

Goodness gracious me! As it turned out, it was a thousand pities that Alfred had not the courage, when first he came to London, to call her "Wife," before he gave the world time to give her a worse title. Then, he could only have been blamed for his imprudent marriage, and I cannot think that would have caused him much regret; but now she had to endure the hard words and the insulting sneers; and, on my word, it was too bad to subject her to the ignominy of being joked about by drunken coxcombs, or hissed at by spiteful women.

It so fell out, that one day we grew bold at being

left so quietly to ourselves, and it was determined we should venture abroad and let the little foreigner have a peep at wonderful London. It would do us all good. We would take Regent Street on our way to Westminster Abbey, and show Rosa the handsome shops. The Tower, the river, and Greenwich were to complete our day's sight-seeing. It was to be a regular jolly, happy day.

The only drawback was that Rosa was obliged to wear her thick lace mask of a veil.

It was a pretty sight to watch the little woman, and listen to her cries of wonder as we drove along. She was a perfect child, and gave full scope to her enjoyment like a little girl seeing a pantomime. "What a number of houses! How could the coachman remember all those streets! She never saw anything so beautiful as the parks! Why were there so many horses and carriages about?"

These were some of the innocent remarks she passed, and we, happy to see her so happy, laughed as if she were the first joker going.

As I had expected, the finery of Regent Street was too much for her. The shop-fronts overcame her, and she so evidently longed to be as near the plate glass as she could, that, at last, Alfred, remembering the lace veil was very thick, could not resist the temptation of seeing her enjoy herself.

Silly fellow! he must have spent fifty pounds that morning. If she said a brooch was lovely, he bought it. Everything she admired was, in a few minutes, carried to the carriage, her paid-for property; until really the number of parcels made it extremely incon-

venient for sitting down, especially as they were always placed on the cushions on my side.

The most curious circumstance of that morning's shopping was that Rosa did not, like most ladies, go into raptures over the costly silk dresses, the elegant bonnets, or the expensive mantles; but the common printed cotton gowns, the fine linens and table damasks, seemed to monopolize her admiration. She was a funny little body.

We were looking in at one of the large mercer's shops, she jabbering out in Italian her ecstasies of delight over some Manchester wonder marked fourpence-halfpenny the yard, when I happened to look round (for, to be candid, Rosa was talking Italian very loudly, and, you know, it does not require much novelty to attract a crowd in the London streets; so I was keeping watch, as it were); well, I happened to turn round to gaze on a remarkably fine footman, with hair as nicely powdered as if he had just come off a plasterer's job, who was staring at Alfred as intently as wax-works.

My eye seemed familiar with the man's dense whiskers. I beheld his velvet legs, and no longer doubted. One of the Madam's menials stood before me!

Of course his mistress could not be far off. My selfishness advised me to fly; my friendship forced me to remain, and warn my favourite pupil of his danger.

To prevent a scene, and yet, if possible, hurry him away, I pretended I had seen a man to whom I owed a heavy bill, and, telling him I would meet him

at the end of the street, I darted across the road, hoping he would follow me.

Instead of that, he and Rosa sauntered onwards as leisurely as along a garden walk, she looking up into his face, and leaning, with clasped hands, affectionately on his arm; he, with his head bent down to hers, enjoying her pretty tattle, and as happy as Momus.

As I watched them, I beheld the dreaded Madam emerge from a shop, and come plump upon her children. They were too occupied to notice her, but she recognized them in an instant.

She drew herself proudly on one side to allow them to pass. Had she chosen, she could have touched him with her parasol, but she was in full dignity, and declined to interfere with his open-day amours.

The thoughtless girl had lifted her thick veil for a moment, but I perceived the Madam did not get a good glimpse of her daughter-in-law's face, despite the piercing glance she shot at the bonnet. She watched the receding couple for a moment or so, and then, white with rage, entered her carriage.

All this I related to Alfred when he returned home from our agreeable dinner at Greenwich. I did not like to spoil his day with any unpleasantness, at least until the pleasure was over.

Whilst he was thinking over what I told him, I obliged him with a few words of good, sound, common-sense advice.

"You will agree with me, my dear Alfred," I said, "that, by keeping away from the Madam, you

are not only getting yourself into disgrace, but actually doing the greatest possible injury to Rosa, by making your mother hate her. There was no mistaking the look she sent after you both, I can assure you. If the Madam is permitted to consider Rosa her unworthy rival in your affections, why, good-bye to all hopes of pardon. Now, do follow my advice. Let me take the drawing-rooms at my aunt Sadgrove's place. Your pretty wife is safe there from all chance of annoyance. I shall always be near her to watch over her like a brother, and you will be at liberty to visit and conciliate the Madam. Come, be reasonable. I know the house is not at present fit to receive your wife; but in less than a week, the dirty rooms can be converted into a palace fit for an ambassador. She can amuse herself laying out the garden, and gain health and strength, whilst you are coaxing over the Madam, and preparing the way for your wife's reception."

Thus I persuaded him into being my aunt's lodger. The next day I had taken the rooms on lease, and given my orders to the nearest carpenter.

My only difficulty was in restraining the grasping, avaricious propensities of my confounded relations.

"I shall not give one penny more," I cried, stubbornly, frowning at Mr. Jabez Sadgrove; "already you've got for your dirty rooms nearly double the rent you pay for the entire house."

"But Tom, dear," answered Mrs. Ruth Sadgrove. "Think of the risk we run; you should remember this Italian woman is a Roman Catholic."

My aunt belongs to the Methodist flock, and sits under Reverend Bellows, at Napish Chapel.

CHAPTER VIII.

WIFE AND NO WIFE.

DEAR Aunt Sadgrove's dirty, greasy, tumble-down house was rapidly transformed into a magnificent, highly-painted, tastefully-decorated, glittering dwelling, fit for the Grand Serang himself.

I personally superintended the alterations, and, like a true artist, allowed the beautiful to have full play. I think I must have been intended by Providence for an architect. Raphael, Michael Angelo, and all the grand fellows of the golden age, were architects as well as painters. It is born in us, sir. All we want is the chance. I am only waiting patiently for Saint Paul's to be burned to the ground before I try my luck at a design.

Never was a house in such dismal repair as that blessed villa. The rats had gnawed it worse than a rabbit hutch; it was rusty and corroded. I condemned the kitchen stairs, as dangerous to life, especially when bringing up a heavy dinner-tray; and observing that the chimney-pots shook in the wind like leaves, I had them all taken down, and replaced by elegant Gothic crimson ones, that gave the roof quite the air of a *petit* Hampton Court.

I was much struck by the indefatigable energy displayed by my Aunt Ruth in hunting after and bringing under my notice the million defects that disgraced the premises.

I remembered that, when first Alfred visited her, she had solemnly and emphatically protested that there was not a better house than hers to be found in Great Britain or the colonies. But the moment she heard that Alfred was to pay for the alterations, she fell to abusing the rooms, sneering at the low ceilings, attacking the small windows, and down-crying the old-fashioned grates ; so that, had I been base enough to listen to the cry of a blood relation instead of the voice of honour, I must have expended on her whims hundreds of Alfred's money.

I could not convince the perverse old woman that a marble mantel-piece in her own sitting-room although it might add to her own grandeur, would not in the least increase Rosa's comforts. As it was, I exceeded my limits in repapering my uncle's bedroom.

The questions of fresh window-curtains, throwing out a bay window, pulling up the drains, and building a more imposing coal-office, I dismissed with a sarcasm that hit her like a stone.

Just to give you an idea of what good taste and judgment, when well directed, will effect, I will mention that the entrance hall was decorated with fresco paintings, *à la Pompeii*, such as would have rejoiced the heart of brave old Cicero himself had he been spared to us.

The drawing-room was a blaze of gilding. You could stand in the centre of the thick carpet and see yourself in six different looking-glasses, each varying the attitude, and allowing you to arrange every portion of your costume.

I went in for the Louis Quatorze style of furniture, sobering it down with a few Cromwell chairs, and a charming pair of Queen Anne card-tables.

The view from the back window, which commanded the knife-house and the dust-hole, I shut out with painted glass. The ceiling was tinted a delicate rose blush, picked out with silver stars. What it wanted in height was compensated for by the delicacy and correctness with which the stars were manipulated.

My Aunt Ruth was so astonished by the completeness of the embellishments that she wanted to raise the rent.

Rosa was delighted when she took possession of her elegant rooms. Alfred, after a few remarks—which, to my mind, arose from jealousy—admitted that I had worked wonders.

He insisted, however, on sending back to the manufactory the imitation stone statues which ornamented the shrubbery. But there certainly was no necessity for his comparing the garden to one of the New Road manufactories. The fine stag he laughed at, was emerging—very prettily, it struck me—from a grove of promising little laurels; the four seasons were playfully guarding every corner of the building—winter being wittily placed next the coal office, and the huge squatting dog was very useful in concealing the door scraper—never at any time a pleasing object.

But I allowed him to have his own way and send away these works of art, though I had of course to refund my commission, which, situated as I always am, was hard and inconvenient.

Directly Rosa was comfortably settled, Alfred was at liberty to return to his mother and make his peace with her. I was to live at my aunt's, and protect the little wife. I furnished of course at his expense.

I was greatly affected by the earnest tenderness with which Alfred implored me to see that his wife lacked nothing that could add to her pleasures. He left everything, he said, in my hands.

Poor boy! he could not have fixed upon a better guardian for his beloved. That very day I ordered in for the pretty Rosa a complete miniature cellar of wine and spirits. Nothing does a fretting, silly, fond wife, so much good as a glass of sound sherry.

"You will not leave me for long, dear Alfred," begged Rosa, when the moment for the first parting arrived, and Alfred stood brushing his hat, and looking as sad as transportation for life.

"If I do not see you every day, your little wife will die."

"Could I live for a whole day without one kiss from darling Posey?" he answered, in that tender, half-moaning, drawling voice peculiar to deep affection. Posey is, in lover's language, "the fond" for Rosa. "Does my dearest think I can be happy away from her? Silly little wife! soon I will take her with me to see this mother, who frightens us so much. Then, nothing shall again part me from my little beauty. So, my Posey will be a good girl, eh? and will not talk of dying, eh?"

Poor things! They were both taken very bad. I thought, if they only knew how insipid this courting

was to a third person, they would reserve it for their private interviews. Such baby nonsense irritates me. I call it indecent.

There was plenty to be done during Alfred's absence—indeed he was much better away. My little lady's education had to be repaired and finished off in the best guinea lesson style. First came the mistress, who undertook to make good the faulty English, mend the pronunciation, and polish up the spelling.

It took a month before the girl could speak her th's like a Britisher.

Next came the mistress who presided over the piano, and formed the voice; and afterwards, the lady who belonged to the dancing profession had her innings—a very fine young woman, who was kind enough to glance at me out of the corners of her eyes when we met in the passage.

Aunt Sadgrove, whilst the first music lesson was going on, called me into her room, and savagely inquired what all that noise meant. She also objected to the dancing, saying, she would not have her house turned into a casino, for all the foreign Roman Catholic women in the world.

My method of subduing my aunt was simple, and sure. I threatened to order our coals of some other merchant, and deprive my uncle of his only customer. He had bought a penny memorandum book on purpose to keep the account, and talked largely of his growing connection, to say nothing of his palming off his guinea railway Silkstones at fabulous over prices.

It was a hard thrust at her pride and income. They had often told me, that as soon as they could make a little show of business, they should either advertise for a moneyed partner, or sell the whole concern, and go as deep as they could into Roman cement and slates. So I had them both under my thumb.

Regularly as clockwork each day came Alfred, full of impatient love. The expectant Rosa knew the sound of his horse's hoofs, and before he could leap from his saddle, she was smiling on him from the doorstep, dressed in all her pretty ribands and fallals to do honour to her lord.

The first hug was on the door mat, the second under the hall lamp, and how many they partook of with closed doors this deponent knoweth not.

I generally allowed them half an hour before I interrupted their delights.

It was understood between Alfred and myself that in Rosa's presence we should never discuss the question of the Madam and the secret marriage. This was done to save her sorrow and disappointment.

Whenever the anxious little woman asked if he brought her good news, he would call her an "impatient, naughty child," and say that it was merely a matter of time; that everything was going on capitally; that in the end all would be well; in fact, put off with any common-place remark.

But presently Alfred would beckon me from the room, and retiring to my private apartment, he would give me the real state of the case.

I remember the first of these consultations—the

day after his return to the Madam: "Well! what did the old lady say?" I asked; "did she scold?"

"Not a bit of it," he answered; "seemed half crazy with joy at seeing me. We were friendly in a minute. Never said a word about my little wife. I cannot make it out."

Our next conversation was not quite so cheering. After dinner, the Madam had said to him, in a careless, sly way, "Who was that lady I saw you walking with, Alfred, down Regent Street—with a very thick, mysterious veil hiding her face?"

He, with assumed indifference, replied, "A lady I was introduced to coming home."

She, still checking her restlessness, added, "You should be more careful, my dear, or you will compromise this lady. You were making the most desperate love to the poor creature."

Pretending to laugh, he tried to turn the conversation, but the Madam is a very perverse old general. "Is that the lady I have heard so much scandal about?" she asked.

"As she is a very amiable, virtuous woman, I shouldn't be at all surprised if she has been abused," was his cynical reply.

After a time mamma wanted to know if this lad was married or single.

He told her she was married.

Then where was her husband?

"In London," he informed her.

"He must be a very strange man," muttered the Madam, "to trust his wife so much to your care—a very strange man indeed!"

She was evidently pleased to hear the lady was married. Little did that ambitious woman suspect that the "very strange man," the husband, was her own blessed son.

"I wish I had courage enough to tell my mother the whole truth, and risk the consequences," he cried, when he had finished his news; "I was nearly doing so more than once; I am such a coward! By Jove, I am allowing my dear little one to be talked of as a bad woman, because I am afraid to proclaim her honour and purity. It will be too late soon."

To celebrate her son's return, the Madam gave a *soirée*, a first-rate, elegant turnout, splendidly got up, with an awning reaching out over the pavement, and crimson carpeting across the footway.

There were at least a dozen linkmen to roar out the titles of the invited.

I was asked. The profusion of refreshments and the magnificence of the supper gave one a faint idea of what fairyland must be like. The music was quite as good as the promenade concerts. As for beautiful women! I can only compare them to a cargo of pine apples. It made me jealous of every man in the room, merely to gaze upon that delicate, heavenly, soft-looking, exquisitely jewelled mob of beauty. The ugliest girl there was a pretty woman. Such nights as those do indeed make a poor seedy chap like me feel very lonely and discontented. I couldn't flirt with a bar-maid for months after.

Of course Alfred was the king of the night; everybody had something pretty to say to him. The little dears positively ran after him with compliments.

Isabel was there, looking up into his face with her deliciously melting eyes, and little dreaming that there was no chance of ever marrying him.

Leonora was there, witty and fascinating as ever, calling him "wretch," and encouraging him to flirt. "Oh, Mr. Berthold! do tell me all about this beautiful Italian girl," she cried, skipping up to Alfred with graceful boldness; "everybody is talking about her, so you needn't make any secret of it with us. Is she so very beautiful?"

The spiteful puss was, I suppose, jealous, and chose to punish her faithless admirer after her own disagreeable fashion.

Half-a-dozen other young ladies, giddy little creatures, sprang from their seats, and, hemming in the unfortunate husband with a barricade of crinoline, joined their entreaties to Miss Leonora's. They made such a noise they quite attracted the attention of the company.

Alfred saw there was no escape for him, so he tried to frighten them away by looking serious. "She is very beautiful!" he answered gravely, scarcely knowing what to say, and yet thinking it would be infamous to utterly deny his wife.

The Madam was close by, listening. "How solemn! how tragic!" cried the Lady Leonora. "Do you love her so desperately as all that?" The other young ladies tittered.

"I love all things good and beautiful!" he replied.

The Lady Leonora seemed to wonder why, if that was the case, he did not love her. "How excessively romantic!" she said, with a half sneer. "I am sure

you are keeping back some wonderful story of adventures. Is she a heroine? You must tell me that. I know she saved your life and all that sort of thing. That is perfectly understood."

"She *did* save my life!" he calmly replied.

I saw the Madam start and turn round suddenly towards her son, as he made this confession; but the younger ladies did not exactly know whether he was joking or talking truth. They all twittered little cries of surprise, and waited for him to tell them more.

I cannot say whether it was to test the character of this beautiful Italian girl, or whether Miss Leonora really meant what she said, when she asked, "Will you introduce me to this lady? I should very much like to know her."

"I will ask her," he replied, "and if she consents I shall be delighted."

Alfred was evidently suffering, and she could not have helped noticing his emotion; but, instead of releasing him from his embarrassment, she continued, in a playful, smirking manner, to question on, from revenge, I suppose? "Since introductions are so difficult, of course she is a lady of very high birth and noble parentage?"

"As noble as any in the room," he replied, almost grandly.

As I told him afterwards, such a chance of proclaiming his marriage would never occur again. He ought to have spoken it out like a brave man, and defied the lot of them.

I was almost tempted to forfeit my three hundred pounds, and do it for him. A man has no right to hold

back the truth when an innocent, helpless, pure creature is made the victim of his cowardice.

That dear soul at home, sitting up so patiently for my return, that she might hear the last news of her loved husband, and pester me with a thousand questions, that to her were all-important, was less able to bear the evil chatter of the world than he, strong burly man backed up with gold and lands, to endure the few mean comments that might be passed on an imprudent marriage.

He was actually defaming her, that he might escape a sneer or so. He should have thought of all this, I say, before he made her Mrs. Berthold. He took her for his wife, a virtuous and noble girl, tested and proved—as he well knew; it was all she had for her marriage portion; yet, actually, this Alfred was permitting the world to rob her of the very qualities which, in every decent person's opinion, would be justification enough and to spare, for what society would term the folly of an unequal match.

Bless my heart, if he had dressed our dear Rosa up a little, and stuck a few diamonds about her, he might have led her into his mother's drawing-room, and even the girls in the room would have fallen in love with the beautiful creature.

I waited at home all the next day, impatiently expecting Alfred, and longing to hear the sequel to the confessions forced from him by that female torturer and head executioner, the Lady Leonora.

As the daylight was failing, Rosa recognised the long-listened-for clatter of hoofs. The door was opened in a minute, and both of us waiting to receive him. He

had been riding hard, for the horse was steaming and its sides heaving as if it would burst the girths.

Something was the matter; something serious had happened, for he was pale, and his dress very slovenly, as if the mind had been too much occupied to think of external appearances—in him a remarkable proof of singular excitement, for he was every inch of him a dandy.

At the sight of Rosa he plucked up a little heart, and fell to kissing her so fervently, that a thought crossed my mind he had promised the Madam to leave her and travel abroad. He quite forgot the street-door was open, and that whilst he was embracing his wife, his groom was staring at master, he apparently forgot everything—himself included—in the enjoyment of his embrace.

If Rosa had not been there, I should have cried out, “Good Heavens, Alfred, what has happened?” or some similar enquiry, so evident was his discomfiture.

When Rosa led the way to her drawing-room, expecting him to follow, he excused himself from following her, saying, he must talk to me first, alone, “on business, dear,” very important business. Lest she might pout and coax him from his intentions, he bounded up stairs, taking them three at a time, and dashed into my bachelor’s barracks.

He took off his hat and dashed it on the ground, knocking in one side beyond the reach of blocking or smoothing irons. A good hat, too!

Whilst I was standing in perfect wonder to see the demure Alfred so uncontrollably excited, he said, in a choking, parched voice, “If you have any brandy, wine,

or anything at hand, if it is only beer, I wish you would give me some!"

Wonder of wonders! A lemonade and spring water man, a fellow who after the second glass replaced the stopper in the decanter; this abstemious model being to call for brandy before he had dined! I began to suspect murder.

He gulped down what is termed a stiff tumbler. Then I ventured to ask, "What on earth had happened?"

"It's all over!" he answered, throwing himself back in his chair, and thrusting his hands into his pockets like a ruined gambler.

"All over!" I cried. "You don't mean to say you have told your mother you were married?" I never take liberties with a man in distress, or else I should have called the old lady the Madam.

"It came to the same thing," he continued. "She knew well enough what I meant."

A paroxysm of rage here seized him. "She is a cold-hearted, worldly woman. If she hadn't been my mother, I should have insulted her. By heaven! I'll follow the oath I swore, and throw up parents, home, and country, to cleave unto my wife. I will! I will! I'll never see that mother of mine again! I'll kill her that way!"

Of course, when he said "kill," he didn't mean emphatically "kill." He was very excited, and, consequently, not particularly choice in his selection of words.

After this, if the big fellow did not pull out his handkerchief and begin to sob. I couldn't stand that.

I liked him too well to witness such grief. We had been companions too long, and he was always so good to me and generous. By Jove! I felt my chin quiver and my nose twitch. Another instant and my own mill-head would have overflowed.

I took his hand—white, slim, delicate thing as it was—and pressed it with truthful sympathy, saying, “Alfred, if I can assist you in any way—if you think my advice is worth the taking, I beg you to let me be of some use to you; but have strength enough, dear boy, to look boldly at your calamity, and without wet eyes, and do not give up your manhood and courage until every hope has been thwarted. My dear old friend, what has happened? Why are you so broken and downcast? Friend, speak to me!”

“God bless you, dear Tom!” he answered. “I can’t help it, I am so very sad and utterly miserable. I will give up the fight. I and the little one will run away, and be happy in spite of the world and my mother. Dear little wife! she shall be my reward, and, perhaps, some day—who can tell—my hard-hearted mother may hunt us up, and force us to love her again.”

By degrees I gathered the details of his grief. The Madam, who, as we know, had overheard the conversation at the party, rose in the morning full of war, and attacked her son as they breakfasted together, determined to sift the mystery, and worm out every particular.”

“You never told me, Alfred,” she began, “that you had been in any great bodily danger during your visit to Italy. How did it happen that this Italian lady, this strange woman I hear so much about, was able to save your life. Were you ill of a fever?”

She had not the courage to look him in the face, though she addressed him in a dry sarcastic voice—a clarion voice sounding to arms.

He, somehow or other, summoned up pluck enough to tell his story, following it pretty closely, but yet carefully hiding such facts as his wife's relationship to the Brigand chief. That would have been too strong a dose for the Madam's pride.

But he dwelt rather lengthily, and with earnest thankfulness, on the heroism and devotion of our good Rosa. He proved how certain was the death from which she rescued him; and, above all, he enlarged on her perfect virtue, and the religious sense which controlled her actions.

Naturally he was greatly excited whilst he was telling this romantic story. But on the other side of the table sat the Madam, calm as one of a jury-box—a determined, cool-headed listener to evidence.

“I hope you rewarded this good girl munificently, as your station in life warranted your doing,” she remarked, when Alfred, exhausted for want of breath, was silent for a time.

“As long as I live she shall share with me!” he answered, gaining courage as he grew angry with his mother's indifference.

“That is right,” she replied. “I should wish my son to prove himself grateful for such an important service.”

“We are one and indissoluble,” he cried. “Her life and mine—the life she preserved—are linked together for evermore.”

It must have cost the Madam an effort—for I cannot

imagine any heart being so callous as to permit such words to leave the mouth, unless some tremendous exertion backed the utterance—it must have cost her great effort when she said, “I shall make it my duty to send this worthy young person a present of fifty pounds. It will enable her to marry happily with one in her own class in life.”

Alfred started up, and focussed a broadside of indignant glances at the old lady. “Neither you nor I, Madam,” he said, “have yet proved ourselves worthy to rank with her class in life; neither, I fear, shall we, when life has gone, stand in the same rank with that good and noble girl.”

I was listening to him—so interested, that my limbs were powerless; he was telling me his story, “fighting his battles o’er again,” the old feelings of pity and indignation influencing him, as they had done during the original interview.

Scarcely had he finished his narration, when a voice we neither of us expected to hear said, in a foreign language, “Alfred, God help and protect me, and reward you.”

Then a little round head, with smooth, shining hair, buried itself between his knees very humbly, and with great devotion. A kneeling, sobbing woman—the dear, self-sacrificing being he had made his wife—was begging for pardon for the sorrow she had so unconsciously brought upon the man she would have died to make happy.

She had heard all. We spoke in English, it is true, but she was clever and quick—perhaps inspired—and understood every word.

Alfred's excited manner, his desire to speak to me before he entered her room, had alarmed the fond little woman, and, without control, she had followed up stairs.

The bitterest week's work I ever endured in my life followed this overheard confession. I had to watch that girl as I would a lunatic. My fear was, lest she should attempt her own life. She was capable either of giving or taking it to serve the man she loved so truly.

I had to follow her from room to room—now shaking her into sense as she lay on the sofa, or coaxing her to leave the open window, through which, for hours, she had been staring, perfectly unconscious, yet so fearfully full of thought.

CHAPTER IX.

LOVE LIES BLEEDING.

BE there no medicines to cure man's inconstancy? Is there no shilling bottle with a three-halfpenny stamp? no forty drops to be taken fasting, in a wine-glass of water; no little thimbleful of famous elixir—to be kept well corked, bulked out by testimonials to look like a pint bottle?

Surely in this land of genius and Divorce Courts some master mind might devote himself to discovering this crying want, and earn a penny subscription monument.

Bless me, how it would pay! I know a hard-up medical man, who would go into the speculation, and

start it with an elaborate professional opinion ; vouching that "the drops" were, at one and the same time, anodyne, yet pleasantly stimulative, agreeably corroborant and decidedly carminative, besides being mildly alterative.

I would myself get up the testimonials. Clarissa should write to me—"Mr. Eyle : Sir, Since Mr. Love-lace has taken your inestimable specific, his behaviour has been most engaging. Every day he insists on my sitting for a shilling photograph. Pray send me another gross of the drops."

That mysterious gentleman the stranger should favour me with his unsolicited testimony. "Drury Lane—Sir, The drops are working wonders. The pudding Mrs. Haller made for me on Sunday last affected me to tears. The children are well. Do not neglect sending me a further supply, or I will not answer for the consequences."

The gentle Heloise should send word that "Thanks to your wonderful drops, Mr. Abelard has been forced to embrace the Protestant faith. We are married. The reverend gentleman is at present out with the perambulator."

I am certain the speculation would answer, if anybody would risk a few hundreds to advertise it well.

It is worth thinking of.

If such a medicine had been in existence, I certainly should have tried a bottle or two of it on Master Alfred Berthold. A tumblerful night and morning would have done him no harm, and saved a certain pretty Italian girl from a great deal of suffering.

I, the calm spectator, the audience of one, having

my eyes open and my head cool, could see the turn matters were taking in that quiet villa by the wood of St. John, and judge, without any great effort, what the ending would be.

I had prophesied, had I not? Could any one have bawled out "beware!" more lustily than your humble servant? It certainly was rather gratifying to my judgment (however disagreeable it might be to Rosa Maria) to find how correctly I had foretold the future. There is a little of the Zadkiel in me.

I repeat again, that the rich sons of rich mammas—stately dames who consider powdered footmen and going to Court among the necessities of life—have no business to marry with simple little fruit girls, however handsome their faces may be. I mean to say that it was cruel of Alfred, considering she saved his life, to doom her to certain misery by making her his wife. It was a mistaken sacrifice on his part and a real one on hers. She never dreamt of such a reward, and really made a favour of accepting it.

Do you think it requires no special education, no hard training, no drawing room drilling, before a woman can play the fine lady? You can understand that if a man wishes to turn carpenter, or a girl become a milliner, they must first learn their business.

Now a trade may be learnt in seven years, but to acquire the art of moving in distinguished society takes twice that period. The shes that follow this calling must be put to the work when young—there are so many vanities to be studied.

You fancy you can walk, but it wouldn't do for Belgravia. You imagine you can sit at table, but they

would blush for you in Grosvenor Square. You flatter yourself that, on all occasions, you can behave yourself like a decent creature, but Kensington would call you a Goth.

Could you, do you think, spend your afternoons in driving from house to house and leaving cards with kind inquiries? That must be done.

How should you like the monotony of park drives, backwards and forwards, day after day, along the banks of the Serpentine? or what say you to the subduing of all emotions and the checking of all impulses?

Pray, my dears, do not imagine that the mystery of grand society consists in putting on a Paris gown, and exhibiting the diamonds. One of their secrets is the art of making a Manchester print look better than a Lyons silk. Another is, in appearing to care no more for gay clothes and trinkets than the girl at the confectioner's does for a three-cornered puff.

You had better thank Heaven you were born "round the corner," and remain happy and contented.

Imagine our dear modest little Rosa Maria chatting with a duke, simpering with an earl, or even with a real baronet, and yet being no more afraid of them than i she had mixed with such grandees all her life.

Wouldn't she be as fluttered as a pork-butcher's wife? Why, even when one—a real one at the Madam's—trod on my toe, I couldn't say a word. Talk to a duke, indeed! I, who came into the world in a first-floor back, I couldn't do it.

If ever such an event should come to pass, before three minutes were gone, I should be asking him to buy a picture.

If, then, a gentleman's son and a rising artist is unequal to such a situation, what could be expected of a poor child who, one day in Rome, was told to put down her flower-basket and come to church.

To assume that because she married a rich man, with a dandy mother, therefore she would leave the sacred edifice an accomplished belle, was trifling with Providence, and insulting the blue book.

Yet I, in a great measure, ascribe the diminution of Alfred's love for Rosa, to her imperfect education, and the fear that she should bring ridicule upon him by her ignorance of great-world etiquette.

There is another reason for his decreasing love. Wife and no wife is always a bad arrangement. When a man has closed his prayer-book, feed the clergyman, and satisfied the beadle, he should, if he wishes to live happily with his mate, be prepared to proclaim to the world, "This is my wife."

When it comes to slinking into private hotels under assumed names, or hiding in quiet suburbs with the landlady as a confidante, love does not have half a chance of doing its work properly. The man, despite his reasoning, feels that he has done something he is sorry for, and that is the first step towards being ashamed of your wife. Their life begins with a regret.

From the moment Alfred left us to return to his mother's house, directly the system of daily visits to his wife was introduced, I guessed the end. He was teaching himself that he could dispense with her company. His comforts, his true home, his friends were away from her. If ever he passed a few days with us, I could see he was as much put out as if he had been

staying at a country inn. He considered he was making sacrifices for her sake. Our quiet evenings bored him.

There was always somebody asked to dinner at the other house. After the Madam had retired to the drawing room, the claret-jug was passed about in good style. Our table service could not, of course, be compared to the rapid attention of the velvet-legged menials, and in the morning he missed his complete toilet-table, and the arrangements of his dressing-room.

What chance, too, has a poor girl of continuing her power over her husband, when a flying visit is the only time permitted her for seeing him? She can only give herself up to her great joy at his presence, and repeat in a hundred different ways how much she loves him.

But the love that shows itself in action—the thousand little tender cares, the constant proof that she thinks only of him, he will never witness that. He will never know the usefulness of his wife. He is deprived of the delightful evidence of the true purport of wedlock. What wonder, then, if he should in time come to think slightly of the life-partnership. He might as well judge of the prosperity of a town from one glance at the church steeple, seen through the window of an express train.

No doubt it is a very gratifying thing to be able to show your wife to the world, and listen to the praise that is evidence of your good judgment in selecting such a woman.

All this he, by his cowardice, missed. No pretty girls, or affable mammas whispered to him, “how lovely she is;” no young ladies circled about Mrs.

Berthold, and worried her into promises of spending evenings at their house. There were no delightful little appointments made for taking drives together, or offer of seats in the opera box, or books to read, or loans of new music.

How proudly a man stands by and listens to this praise from women. He thinks to himself that such admiration *must* be genuine. After such an evening, no care can equal his, as he arranges the shawl about this peerless darling's shoulders, lest she should suffer from the night air as she skips into her carriage.

Then, too, when the men, his companions, add their voices to the anthem raised to the angel, when all eyes follow her with unmistakeable admiration, and—lady-killers all—give truthful evidence of their envy at his great good fortune. At the clubs they ask one another "Who was she? who and what was her father? had she any money?" But all agree about her beauty, and call him a lucky man. How agreeable this must be to a man of Alfred Berthold's stamp.

You might have different opinions about the value of these discussions, but he hadn't your strength of mind. It would have been a moment of choaking exultation with him, if a lord had reproached him with, "My dear fellow, you have never introduced me to Mrs. Berthold." We may not care about a lord's patronage, but Alfred did, and Rosa was *his* wife, not ours.

He would have been sustained by the comforting knowledge that these dandies and club exquisites might lisp their pretty compliments, and put on their most conquering smiles, but let him beckon, and she would follow him; and, if he wished it, walk barefoot after

him to his house, carrying his umbrella, if he chose, and running on a-head to knock at the door, if he asked her. She is devoted to him, loves him even in her sleep, with all her heart, without heed or reasoning.

All this did Alfred miss, and the loss of it was ruin. Yet, had he been a better man, he need not have foregone such pleasures, for his wife had a face that would have made a sheriff's officer feel poetic, and a heart to win even the Madam.

I do not mean to say that Alfred's love flew away suddenly like a frightened crow. It failed him gradually—melting slowly, and losing its sharp edges as he became accustomed to Rosa's beauty, and deadened to the novelty of her charms.

The gallop round the Regent's Park grew, in time, to be monotonous. It interfered with his club appointments. He had to refuse many invitations, because he was due for the evening at St. John's Wood. For a long time he struggled with himself, and never missed his daily visit. When at length he did so, and came the next day with many excuses, and extra fondness to make his peace, instead of the scolding he expected, Rosa (though the poor thing had been almost heart-broken) never looked or spoke a rebuke, but forgot, in the pleasure of seeing him, that he had been unfaithful.

She should have flown at him savagely, and wept and screamed if she really wished to keep him obedient and true.

That would have frightened him into constancy.

CHAPTER X.

IT BEGINS TO BLOW COOL.

I WILL tell you the reasons why and how I knew that Alfred Berthold was growing tired of his wife (I do not like to say "growing ashamed" of her, though I might, if I was spiteful, and yet have I spoken the truth).

He was a fashionable man, a driver of mail-phaetons, a Berkeley Square pet. The wife that would have suited him should have been a glory to him, and increased his importance. But Rosa was hidden away, kept secret as a fault, never spoken of, and only thought of with regret—the greatest folly he had been guilty of.

It became a struggle with him to continue his affection even decently. Before me he still professed to be contented with his lot, but that was from pride, because I had warned him.

When by himself, he groaned in the spirit, and wished his time were to come over again. Unfortunate idiot!

The greatest opposition to his happiness arose from his still appearing before the world as a single man, a good match, a most desirable husband, or, as old ladies said, "a kind-hearted, dear fellow, who would make any woman happy." (Poor Rosa! had he made you happy?)

Mammas spoke to him in suave, affectionate voices. Young beauties teased him most encouragingly. If he danced twice with the same girl, "ideas" came into her head. He was scolded for "never calling." Sometimes he was invited to three dances the same evening, and went to them all, the favourite at each. Papa, in a jocosé,

open way, would tell him that Eulalie, on her marriage day, would have £10,000. "A pretty sum, Sir, I can tell you;" and then, in a whisper, add, "and three times that amount when her old father—her Papa—died."

One night General Pounders, a very old friend, said openly at the supper table, when proposing Alfred's health on his birth-day, "that if he—the General—had such a son, he should die happy;" and Miss Pounders burst into tears, and Mrs. Pounders looked at him like a dove-eyed mother.

If he had married the lovely Miss Pounders, an estate in Yorkshire, and a mountain of ready money—left her by a grandmother—would have been among the pretty ornaments on the bride-cake.

These complimentary attentions to Alfred, bachelor, frightened Alfred, the married man. He felt as if he were swindling these good people, and afraid lest he should be detected. How could he, after such flattering speeches, make public his marriage? What an insult that would be to the Mammas and Papas. What would General Pounders say?

No! Rosa must keep her room, and he keep his secret. There was no chance of release from his hasty romantic folly. He must bear his lot with patience. Her health was delicate, but he checked *that* thought, and his heart was ashamed of his brain for suggesting it.

I have told you that his visits to St. John's Wood had become excessively unpunctual and irregular; in fact, as if they had changed from pleasure to irksome duty. Neither his wife nor I could say with certainty

in the morning whether he would honour us with his company that day or that day week.

When Rosa asked me for my opinion on the chances of a visit, I had to fudge up consoling answers, and screen my friend with the neatest falsehood I could invent.

I hadn't the heart to undeceive her in her belief in his love.

CHAPTER XI.

VERY FROSTY BEHAVIOUR.

IF it amused her to stand at her bed-room window, and from behind the curtains watch down the road for his coming; if it was any consolation to her to run to the door twenty times a day, to find, instead of her Alfred, only the butcher's boy with the chops, the baker, or the postman, why, it didn't hurt me, and the exercise kept her blood in circulation.

At first Alfred was ashamed of his absences, and came with long elaborate excuses, but after a time he grew bold and brazen, and gave up the practice of accounting for his time. Perhaps he thought that Rosa must have been accustomed to his infidelity—habituated and trained to his neglect.

Never was he more mistaken in his life. She was simply patient and submissive. Every moment he was away she was thinking of him and longing for his presence.

It was to win his applause that she fagged for hours

at her lessons, like a school-girl training to be a governess. Every day she wrote him letters, not to be sent by the post, but to be kept until he came to read them and to show him how she improved with her English and writing.

I have some of these curious simple letters by me now—curious, misspelt, half-foreign things, all about *him*, worshipping *him*, hat, boots, and all, but despite the monotony of subject, very affecting to me when I read them.

She was a perfect mistress of the art of saying “I love you” in fifty thousand different ways.

At her piano she made great progress. Music came naturally to her. She could catch a tune more easily than I can a fly; the art was in her head, and oozed out from her fingers, so that she played better from ear than from her notes. It seemed so easy that I was myself tempted to take six lessons on the accordion; but I never got beyond Rousseau’s Dream, while she jumped on a-head from music-book to music-book, until it became a treat to listen to her, as of an evening I lounged in the arm-chair, smoking my meerschaum and sipping her sherry.

But Alfred apparently took little interest in anything the girl did. The first time I became perfectly aware that his heart had wandered away from his affectionate wife, was on one evening when—generous, knocked up rake of a boy—he startled us by announcing that he should sleep at St. John’s Wood.

She was singing to him that pretty ballad by Herr Bosh—the words either by Ernest Anon or Charles Ibbid, I forget which—called “Let me sip thy lovely Tears.”

I thought he was listening as intently as I was, for it is a pretty thing, and suited her voice. But in the midst of the second verse, just as she was giving out with tremendous feeling the celebrated line,

“Such nectar, sweetened by a smile, is tippie for the gods,
my love.”

he jumped up, saying he had forgotten to write a letter, and forced her to quit the piano to find him pens, ink, and paper.

On another occasion—I think he had been away nearly three weeks—he walked into the house in his confounded impudent manner, as if nothing had happened, and almost made a favour of submitting to the caresses my dear little Rosa, half hysterical with joy, was showering over him.

He never thoroughly appreciated that peerless creature—she was thrown away on him.

Ill-used, affectionate, beautiful woman, the more he wronged her the fonder she grew. I could only compare her to a poor dog, chained up for weeks in a stable, and unexpectedly released to be shown to master. How it twists, and whines, and climbs about him to lick the hand.

And I can only compare him to that same master who cries out, “Down! down!” and frowns at the faithful dog.

Deuce take me if I can understand how some hearts are put together! I suppose, like watches, there are small Geneva hearts, uncertain goers and almost useless, as well as honest, first-rate chronometer hearts, that may be always relied upon.

Well! on the occasion I refer to, she, after dinner,

placed in his hand a bundle of twenty-one letters, written by her to him on those long evenings he had made so dull to her by his absence.

Any other man would have snatched at them like a bankrupt at a pile of bank-notes ; but he received the packet as calmly as change for sixpence. He did exert himself to open the first, said her capital B's were not improved, and scolded her for spelling generous with a j, and noble with a b-e-l.

I could have stamped on his toes ! He to be called *generous* and *noble* ! The little old woman's mistake was not only in the spelling.

In the course of that evening I wanted a light for my meerschaum. With the most obliging readiness he took out the letter he had grumbled over, but not read, and, twisting it into a torch, handed it to me. As I held it to my pipe-bowl I read these words—"I know you love me."

By the powers ! I thought to myself, he has a queer way of showing it !

The greatest cruelty of his conduct was the seclusion he condemned her to. She was on no account to leave the house, or even show herself at the windows. If she languished for fresh air she was to hire a fly, and with the windows up, drive down the Finchley Road.

I told him he was killing her, and tried to reason with him, but he met my arguments with contemptible rudeness, and requested me to mind my own business.

I confess I adored this unfortunate girl ; I confess that all my affection had shifted from Alfred to his wife ; that I loved her—but mind you, only like a brother—a brother who has only one sister.

I would have gone through fire or water, borrowed money, fought big men, or anything to serve her. She was so resigned and gentle, so beautiful and neglected. When, to cheer her, I praised Alfred and assured the half-doubting woman of his love, it was positively affecting to witness her thankfulness. She would follow me about for these grateful words; or if I was sitting down, hover round me like a waiter, to fill up my glass with sherry, hand me the tobacco, fetch me a light, press whisky and water upon me—anything to make me continue talking about her dear rip of a husband.

Once, and only once, did I actively take up Rosa's cause, and, at great peril of self, force him to single combat (a verbal fight), for her sake.

This man had grown so heedless of her comforts that he even allowed her purse to run dry, and, indeed, put us both to great inconvenience by his selfishness; for how could the housekeeping be properly continued with any comfort unless there were a few pieces in the exchequer? (I boarded with Rosa.)

She had actually to borrow from me. Highly improper! I then thought it time to interfere. I found this good husband at his club, and he came to me smelling of French wine—Chablis, unless my nose deceived me.

I am afraid I lost my temper—an unpardonable stupidity in a poor man. I was incautiously trenchant and caustic. I said in my dry way, "You may run off and desert her, or anything in that innocent line, if you like, old boy; she may survive that, but I wouldn't try starving her yet, if I were you."

I also told him I thought my aunt Sadgrove, if he

really did mean killing her by destitution, would prefer the murder being committed at somebody else's house. In fact, I lashed into him.

He laughed. That was proof positive that his love was dead. Had he resented my jokes, I should have had hopes for poor Rosa.

"Really, Alfred," I said, as I shook hands at parting, after pocketing a cheque, "you do not know the sterling worth of that dear lady, your wife. How you can have the strength to neglect her as you do, is to me a miracle. What has she done? Isn't she the same woman you loved so desperately in Rome? By Jove, you don't deserve to own her!"

You see I can be severe and bold, too, when I like. Matters had come to a crisis; it was time to be decided and energetic—no money in the house, and borrowing from me!

After an unusually long absence, Alfred came to us in a great hurry, saying his mother had been seized with a violent illness, and was ordered by her physicians to start instantly for the south of France. He put the question to Rosa, whether he should go with the Madam, and watch over the sick parent—whether a stranger or a son should support the mother's trembling limbs; and, in fact, rattled on at such a pace, that he completely deceived the pair of us.

It was her duty to submit. Would he promise to write to her, and be faithful, very faithful, even in his thoughts? Then God bless him, and she would pray for his mother's recovery.

We had a letter from Tours, saying the Madam was better; we had another from Nice, declaring she

was worse ; and from that time all correspondence ceased.

Was he trying to break his wife's heart ? or had he grown so indifferent to her peace of mind, that the exertion of writing was greater than his affection ? Weeks passed, and became months, and yet no news. She fretted and I consoled ; but it is the hardest work going, that of soothing and cheering, when you yourself have lost all faith ; inventing excuses for a man who deserves none, and rousing a pining wife with hopes you do not yourself believe in.

Yet she was very grateful to me for my commiseration, and did all she could to make me some return. She sang the songs I liked, made me sit in the arm chair, hemmed my pocket-handkerchiefs, worked slippers for me, and waited upon me more like a servant than anything else. So thankful for a few kind words, poor thing !

I should have been happy and jolly if she could have been less fidgetty about him, but every now and then, as of an evening I sat quietly reading, and she sat quietly at work, I would hear a big breeze of a sigh ; and the soft Italian voice would murmur, " I wonder where he is now ? "

I couldn't tell her, sweet child. I might guess and guess, and be no nearer the truth. My usual reply was, " In France, thinking of his wife, to be sure. " It was rather far-fetched, but it refreshed her.

To add to her discomforts, my Aunt Sadgrove began to persecute her on religious motives. The stupid old woman, urged on by Bellows and the congregation of Napish Chapel, tried her hand at rescuing Rosa from the errors of the Church of Rome.

As my aunt came down stairs of a morning, she would thrust under the door of her tenant's bed-chamber a tract against Catholicism.

One morning Rosa brought me a pamphlet called "Hard Nuts for Romish Teeth," and asked me if I had dropped it.

On another occasion she handed to me a greasy paper entitled, "Rome—a gin;" and, again, I was taxed with being the owner of "Blessed Pap for Papists."

I knew where the precious documents came from. I took them into my aunt's room, as she and uncle were at dinner, and banged them down (so hard that the potatoes jumped out of the dish), saying, "You had better burn this waste paper, or use it for curl papers, only do not let me see any more of it. I wonder you haven't more sense than to insult the very lady who pays your rent and taxes for you. I have no patience with your 'Hard Nuts,' and 'Blessed Pap,' and 'Roman Gin.' You stick to coals, and thank heaven that quarter-day is provided for; that's more in your way, and don't let that Bellows persuade you to disgrace yourself by such rude behaviour."

My uncle was tickled at my expression of sticking to coals, and asked if the cellar wasn't nearly empty; but my aunt shook her head solemnly, and muttered something about lost sheep, and the reclaimed lamb.

I answered her, "Don't be vulgar, Aunt Ruth, and pray give over calling names. That is Bellows's professional business. He calls it kindness of heart and purity of spirit; but it isn't decent for a respectable coal-merchant's wife to be so brutal. As for telling which of us is a lost sheep, how can we decide? Bel-

lows grumbles because all the Catholic flocks take the opposition road, and pay toll at the Pope's gate, and it is pretty much the same cry on the Romish side. Do you think that a religion, which has borne hard wear and tear for more than a thousand years, is to be toppled over by a few of Bellows's greasy tracts? Don't you know why he writes these Nuts, and Paps, and Gins? It isn't to convert the Catholics, as you think, but to convince and secure the Protestants, and prevent such as you from deserting to the opposition. That's the motive, only you cannot see through it."

"Listen to the heathen!" cried Aunt Ruth, slicing at the cold beef very spitefully. But I am glad to say I effectually checked her attempts at conversion. She didn't like such fiery ordeals as losing a lodger.

Two months had passed, and yet no news of Alfred. He might be dead for all we knew. I was puzzled what to do or think. Every day Rosa grew more and more anxious, until, at last, she gave over sleeping at night.

That was a climax that thoroughly perplexed me. The girl was evidently sinking. It was, indeed, too bad. Scarcely married one year, and yet deserted.

By Jove! such a pretty face was worthy of, at least, four years' devotion.

In my alarm, lest she should give way and be thrown upon a sick-bed, I tried to devise various little amusements to cheer her up and make the time pass quickly. I taught her *écarté* and cribbage. I persuaded her to give me Italian lessons, but all to no use. I had to wake her out of her dreams, and tell her when it was her turn to play, or to take up a trick, or move a

peg. Her cheek was eternally resting on her hand, and her thoughts wandering over the Channel.

A doctor was called in, and he made her take quinine until her head ached. I ran up a furious bill for flys, and wore out the road to Finchley, but fresh air had no effect upon her. She seemed torpid and unconscious.

As a last resource, I thought I would try what music would do, and took a box at the Opera. It was a bold thing, considering the strict injunctions Alfred had left with me, but, confound him, his heartlessness had so disgusted me, my only care was for Rosa, and not his grandeur.

To my surprise, Rosa made no objections to the treat. She dressed herself very prettily, or rather my aunt did, for she was as helpless and submissive as a child. Perhaps she thought that whatever I asked her to do was according to Alfred's desires.

The hood of her opera cloak nearly concealed her face, and I so timed ourselves that we got into our box a few minutes after the doors were open. I arranged the side-curtain like a screen, placed her opera-book nicely by her side, and focussed her glasses ready for use the moment the curtain went up.

Gradually the blaze of light, the novelty of the scene, and the bustle of people taking their places, roused her. By the time the orchestra began to tune up, she was much better; when the overture commenced, she was nearly convalescent; and the moment the first chorus burst forth, she was in excellent health and spirits, her cheeks flushed, her eyes open and bright and her dear little mouth smiling.

After all, I was the best doctor.

I don't believe she had ever been to the play before. She seemed to think it was all real. When Pollio confessed that he no longer loved Norma, but had taken a strong fancy to Adalgisa, she was greatly shocked. She nearly had a fit of madness when Grisi sang "*Casta Diva*;" and, altogether, she revived and was completely happy.

Considering she had scarcely eaten anything for weeks past, I determined to force upon her, artfully, a little light refreshment between the acts, and—hang the expense—I ordered ices and sponge cakes.

The little woman nibbled at her cake, and looked so charming, I thought. "Ah! if Alfred was to see her, wouldn't he love her again, and ask pardon for his cruelty." How I did work for that man; and disinterestedly too; for, though the year had nearly passed, not a penny of his promised three hundred pounds had I yet seen.

The house was very full. I cannot say how the boxes were on our side, but on that facing us, all, with one exception were taken. That empty box attracted our attention. We laughed about it, and made little bets as to whether anybody would occupy it or not, and then whether they would be ladies or gentlemen.

I was doing my utmost to amuse her, and make her laugh, and was glad to turn to account any nonsense that came into my head.

The second act was nearly over, Pollio had been seized, and Norma was on the point of surrendering herself to punishment, when I (Rosa was too much under the influence of opera to notice anything, thank goodness) when I beheld a stately lady with a diamond

brooch that shone like Jupiter in a frosty sky, and sent out coloured rays like the spokes of a wheel, when I beheld an austere, cold-faced matron enter the empty box, escorted by an elegant, slim young man, and a young lady with a top-heavy wreath.

My legs went so limp you might have plaited them. The Madam, Alfred Berthold, and an unknown but elegant female were facing us.

I saw Alfred smile down upon the strange maiden. She turned up her face to receive the look as on a plate, and then tenderly half closed her eyes, and tried to be fascinating.

It was an evident flirtation, dangerous, earnest, warm, and much enjoyed.

My first action was to pocket the opera-glasses. The pupils of Rosa's eyes were too large for her to see plainly a far-off object. My next was to fidget at the curtain until I had worked it round her like a cloak.

Then I drew back into the darkness, and awaited the worst.

How thankful I was that Rosa did not witness her husband's conduct. I should have had to take her home on a shutter, or leave her at the nearest hospital.

She would have fainted right off, had she seen the unknown girl, hiding her face behind the bouquet, and glancing at him cunningly over the roses, whilst his eyes "went sly," and he flushed up from chattering to her.

They were leaning back as if to conceal themselves, enjoying their stupidities in a congenial half gloom. He picked at her flowers, and she rapped his fingers with her fan. By the powers, it was a case.

Now I could understand why Rosa was buried alive. I determined to spare her this grief, by whisking her home.

The curtain fell, and I, anxious to be off, hurried Rosa to come away. Of course she wanted to stay.

No! no!—she must come directly. I pleaded her weak health, and the night air, the crowd, everything and anything. The good child, seeing how earnest I was, rose, wondering at my impatience.

We were ready to go, my hand was on the handle of the door, when Alfred, as if he did it purposely to vex me, jumped up and left his box.

There was nothing for it but to sit down again. We should have met him in the corridor.

Dear Rosa stared at me, and thought me mad to be so changeable; but, as usual, offered no resistance to my wishes.

It was not long before she noticed that the box opposite was occupied. Then she asked for the opera-glasses “to decide our bets.”

It was a painful moment for me, and perhaps I did wrong; but I gave them. She had a good look at the Madam; a long, almost rude, stare at the Madam, as if the *lorgnette* had become fixed, like horns, to her forehead.

It was an uncontrollable, pre-ordained thing, I suppose, in compliance with the mysterious natural law, I imagine, under some philosophical spirit world, mesmeric influence, I take it.

I recalled her to modest behaviour by asking her what she thought of the old lady? “She is a fine woman,” she answered, dropping her hands as if tired,

"but her mouth—look at her mouth—why does she clench her lips together?"

Now, it struck me that, should Alfred continue his present tyranny towards his wife, she, unfortunate victim, would, perhaps, never have another chance of beholding her mother-in-law; and for fear the weak, sinking thing should depart this world without a knowledge of her relation, I thought it my duty to enlighten her about this fine woman, seated so grandly before us.

"Rosa," I said, "guess who that lady is? I wanted you to come home because she was here. Do you understand me?"

My voice was solemn and sad. She seized my meaning quicker than I had expected. Withdrawing to the back of the box, she, for ten minutes, I should think, continued to stare at the mother of the man she adored.

I left her to herself, keeping my head turned to the house until she addressed me, saying, "Now I am ready—we will go."

As we rode towards home she had a thousand questions to ask about the young lady in the wreath. To throw me off my guard, she praised this girl's pretty face and elegant figure, evidently trying to hide her jealousy.

A wife who sees her husband for a few hours in the course of months, is, I think, justified in looking with suspicion upon every woman more favoured than herself with opportunities of meeting him.

I knew Rosa was not strong enough to undergo a jealous fit. Instead of raving, she would have crept into a corner and pined. There was no help for it but

to risk another falsehood—the ten thousandth, I should think.

“She is a niece of his, I believe,” I told her. Heaven have mercy on me! Do lies told in charity, to save another from misery, count like wicked, selfish, profit-seeking deceptions? If they do, I am a man deep in the angels’ books.

There was one comfort to be deduced by Rosa from the Madam’s appearance at the Opera. It was a proof—she thought—that Alfred had returned to London (I never betrayed that man; never said a word about seeing him in his mother’s box).

Relying upon a visit, Rosa gained heart. She almost forgot the feeling of degradation, the stinging suspicion that she was cast away as not good enough, that had oppressed her as she had stood watching the mother-in-law. She had a peculiar method of her own for overcoming such thoughts, and that was by agreeing with them, by confessing to herself that she was unworthy to be related to such exalted beings; that it was presumption in her to hope for their affection.

Was it not her Alfred’s wish that she should be unknown? Then why repine? Was she not his wife? Surely that was reward sufficient. In a few hours his lips would be on her cheek, she should press his dear form to her bosom. She had done nothing that could interfere with the delight of his embrace; every wish, every command she had diligently obeyed. She had been his obedient, uncomplaining little wife.

The next day, long before I was up and dressed, she was bustling about her rooms arranging and tidying them, poor soul! Playing at the housewife, thinking

to please him. Her great ambition was to make her home comfortable and tempting to him. Perhaps he might stay then.

The poor girl washed her little china figures, fussed about her book-shelf, and decorated his toilet-table. Her great fear was, lest he should arrive before she had decked herself out to receive him.

I thought to myself, "Where is your hurry, my girl?" for I knew him pretty well by this time. Presently down stairs she came looking, ah!—there! lovely! I told her so, and made her happy. She reasoned, "If he admires me, what will dear Alfred say?"

Poor infant! he was her husband, and I wasn't, and that made all the difference between us.

The hours passed; lunch time slipped by, the sun sloped over our house, and covered the front garden with shade; the first gas lamp was lighted, but deuce a bit did we see of Master Alfred. It was a question whether dinner should be turned into supper.

The servant came in to say the soup was dried up, the fish spoiled, the birds done to a cinder, but with her lovely eyes she again and again implored for a few minutes delay—"he was so certain to come."

I remembered I read and re-read the last page of the *Times*, not noticing the words, but mechanically following the printed lines, and saying to myself, "How mistaken I have been in this man; how brutal he has proved himself."

On the sofa in the corner, behind my back, for I had sense enough to know my gaze would be painful to her, she lay, very still—so still, that at times I held my breath to listen to her respirations. That was

the most mournful twilight I ever remember to have passed.

When the clock struck eight she rose, and in a hoarse voice that was fudged up to keep back her grief, she asked me to excuse her—she would retire to her room. She was sobbing internally.

I followed her to the door with my arms stretched out, balancing her steps, lest she should fall.

If the handle had turned easily she would have escaped; but some difficulty opposing her weak hand disturbed the strength she required to check her sorrows. She fell back exhausted and heart-broken, and up bubbled the tears, a drenching shower of grief!

Lord bless me, what could I say or do! what use to bid her "be a woman." She was a woman, a good, injured, uncomplaining woman. Dear! dear! it made me weep too. If I, without her excuses from weakness, from mere compassion, could not be a man, how could she, sweet creature, so deeply injured, so wickedly ill-used, command herself.

I couldn't for the life of me reply to her when she said, "I know all, now," for I had known that very same "all" months ago.

Before six the next morning (how the deuce could I sleep?) I sent Aunt Ruth (who grumbled at being disturbed so early) into Mrs. Berthold's room to learn how she had passed the night. I need not publish the answer.

I had hit upon a scheme, which seemed to me the only chance left. To hunt up Alfred, and appeal to him by threats, prayers, or anything, so long as he could be brought to reason. Confound the fellow! I

had known him a good-hearted, right-minded man, and I reckoned on some of his better nature being still left unused in his soul.

So I wrote to "My dear Mrs. Berthold," reminding her that it was wrong and unjust in her to condemn "our dear Alfred" before we were certain he actually was in London (how fortunate I had kept that secret, wasn't it?) and I offered to dash off to the Madam's and make the necessary inquiries after him.

Believe me or not, as you like, but this letter brought her down stairs in less than half an hour. The galvanism of hope had roused her dead heart.

His love was too important to her life, for her to "lay her down and die," before she was thoroughly persuaded that it was useless to live. Besides, I had written so coldly, and with such calm reason, that any one, less mad than she was, would have been deceived.

My visit was rather an early one for the fashionable Alfred. The maid was sweeping out the hall when I arrived, and, at her summons, I had the gratification of seeing one of the elegant footmen in his deshabelle—and a dirtier, more tawdry wretch, I never wish to look on. Velvet breeches and fresh powder, certainly, have their charms.

"How long had Mr. Alfred returned from the Continent?" I asked the fantastic menial. He stared, and replied that the family never left London "before Haugust at the hearliest." I stared too, but in sincere disgust at his master's meanness. The South of France trip was then a delusion and a swindle.

At first I was denied admission; it was more, the footman said, than his place was worth to disturb his

master at that early hour. But my threats of forcing my way up stairs and arousing all the house, at last convinced the butler, who recognised me, that I was not to be trifled with.

"What the deuce is the matter?" inquired Alfred, as I entered his room.

Great credit is due to me for my self-command. I told him all.

"You're a good fellow for not letting the cat out of the bag about seeing me at the Opera," he answered. "She had no business to go there, and it serves her right for disobeying me. Tell her I am in Boulogne. I am perfectly serious, my good fellow. I shall be there before night."

"And when do you return?" I inquired.

"Directly the cold weather sets in," was the reply.

What would have been the use of rebuking such a man? I left unspoken all the smart, caustic reproaches I had prepared, and returned to St. John's Wood to invent more falsehoods, and deceive Rosa with calmness and peace.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

SPEAKING honestly, I have the worst temper in the world. If I were better off, more independent of my brother man, I should become a perfect brute. My wretched lot and straitened circumstances curb my vicious inclinations. The irresistible humbler, the rapid cure for a stiff neck is the last shilling.

This is the only explanation I can offer for my behaving with such restraint during that terrible interview with Mr. Alfred Berthold. I feel I ought to have lashed him with rebukes, and speared him with reproaches.

To tell the truth the fellow so staggered me by his cool heartlessness, I lost my presence of mind ; or, generally speaking, I am rather clever at denouncing crime, and fond of it.

No longer friend of mine ! no longer " my dear Alfred !" No ! henceforth, if you please, let our intercourse begin and end with business matters. Pay me my hire, and then farewell until my next quarter is due.

I fled his mother's house glancing defiance at the butler, and sneering at the pampered menials of the plush. I cast that house from my heart.

The worthless wretch ! the fool ! Possessed of a priceless treasure, an angel, a gentle and uncommonly beautiful wife, and yet trying to kill her. By Jove ! as I recalled her sweet, suffering face, her patient amiability, and his disgusting behaviour, I was as nearly as possible kicking a little boy who asked me what o'clock it was. Confound this Berthold man he didn't deserve her, and that's the truth.

In what a terrible fix was I placed ! How very unpleasantly situated ! I had espoused the cause of a beautiful and ill-used lady, and yet my circumstances actually forced me to become the agent for her husband's cruelty.

I was his managing man in brutality, all his heartless speeches were to pass through my mouth. It was

left to me to stab to the heart that incomparable woman. Or I might have mercy upon her and cheer her up with charitable deceptions, cunningly wind up the clock-work of life, and keep the heart ticking. Ha! ha! there I had him in my power.

It was either a job for the nearest undertaker, or I must lie a little longer on Christian principles and screen her rogue's villany.

To clear my brain and determine upon what had better be done I walked about St. James's Park, trying my utmost to reduce my high pulse to the moderate beating of a disinterested spectator of other people's misdeeds.

I bought a penny loaf and fed the ducks, I stared at the long cannon from Egypt, and tried to count the stones the little boys had thrown into its mouth. I had a glass of new milk, and saw it drawn from a cow with highly interesting hoofs that turned up like Turkish slippers.

Presently I could whistle a little, and pretty correctly. My stomach was comforted, and ceased to tremble. I could take counsel of myself. From tenderest childhood, new milk always did have a peculiar effect on my system.

I reached St. John's Wood a prepared and determined individual. Before I had time to knock the door was opened by that peerless creature, the anxious angel on the look out.

Now began my acting. I forced my mouth into a cunning grin, I half closed my eyes, and made them look saucy and full of fun. Poor thing! it was balm and comfort to her to see my face so merry.

When she nervously ventured an inquiry I assumed a familiar half-impertinent *brusque* manner, and vowed I shouldn't tell her a word until I had breakfasted, "for I was famished, and mad for coffee."

That was only my diplomacy. Don't you understand how useful a piece of toast would be, if she got the better of me with a perplexing question. There was no guarding against, or being up to her innocence. She would puzzle you with unexpected interrogatories, as a child does when it meddles with theology. If at any time my answer was not ready I could take a bite of toast, and under the excuse that it is rude to talk with your mouth full, think a bit.

My object was to make her believe that Alfred was still on the continent.

As I drew my chair to the table I pretended to be seized with a fit of laughter, which was intended to prepare her for good news.

Directly I saw her eyes light up a little I tried to look as jolly as a farmer after a good market, and said, in a merry way, "I'll tell you what it is, Mrs. Berthold, we are a couple of absurdly suspicious ninnyhammers, who deserve to have their ears pulled. You are a dreadful case—you are. I have a great mind to tell Alfred when he returns, how foolishly a certain young lady has been behaving herself during his absence."

"Then he has not yet returned," cried the poor dear.

It was a troublesome direct question, but I warded it off by playfully mocking her voice, and imitating her question. If you can get them to laugh, half the work is over.

"He's not coming home for three weeks," I added (which was true enough).

Then, to prevent her from questioning me, I began to tease her in a playful way, that must have convinced her it was right. "I shall certainly tell him," I said, "about the crying and fainting, and refusing to eat good wholesome dinners. You'd better bribe me at once to hold my tongue. Come now! how many songs will you sing me?"

Bless you, in less than no time at all she was an altered woman. You see I had this advantage over her, she was too modest to question me very roughly; besides, it was necessary to her life to believe in Alfred's constancy.

Whenever she ventured a new inquiry, I could see her trembling lest my evidence should go against the culprit. She was full of doubt, but afraid of disbelieving.

The comfort of my words freshened her up, her head rose, her voice crisped up and became almost joyful. The truth is, I made myself so especially pleasant, I should have taken a bill discounter off his guard.

The house seemed like itself again, she was bustling about and getting everything ready to receive him. I was petted and sung to, and forced to drink sherry and be waited upon.

It cut me to the heart, though, to hear her every morning count the days that had passed, and say in her hopeful voice, "He'll soon be back now;" whilst I, like a villain, had to reply, "Yes! only a few days longer to wait."

If the brute had only written her one line, or even

sent her a message! I posted to him three imploring letters, capitally worded, and, I think, rather touching; but plague take the man, his heart was hard and sour; I knew his tactics well enough, and could almost guess the ending.

The three weeks passed, but no husband came home! I implored her to throw in another week, working hard to make her hope and hope, and then there was nothing for it but to have her put to bed and send for the Doctor—a very respectable and not expensive gentleman, who secured our affections and patronage in a few minutes by giving my Uncle an order for a ton of coals. My Aunt was half inclined to fall ill from gratitude.

This Doctor did me the honour of mistaking me for the sick lady's husband, so I thought it better to explain to him the cause of his patient's malady. "Purely mental, I take it," was my suggestion.

"Exactly so," he replied.

Naturally, I didn't want him to be blundering in his scientific darkness, sending in draughts by the gross, which Rosa would never take, and nobody would buy, even at half price. We had no money to fool away in coloured water. A little quinine wine was the extent of his prescription—that with quiet, and a generous diet.

I ordered in, I remember, some very choice port of fine full-bodied quality, but I don't think she drank two glasses out of the entire dozen—poor lady. Every day the Doctor called, and every day his report on the case was—"I don't think we are any better, but I don't think we are any worse."

"Dash it!" I used to say to myself, as he left, "you earn your money easily enough."

There was just room enough in our load of miseries for another to force its way in ; and, a tight fit it must have been. Still it did come upon us, placing me in a very delicate position.

After one of his visits, the Doctor requested to see my Aunt Ruth. I had not even a suspicion of what was the matter, and actually thought the Doctor either wanted more coals or was going to complain about the last.

When my Aunt (who, from being a civil and grateful poor relation, in less than five minutes puffed out with importance, and tried to order me about most offensively), revealed to me that there was every chance of a child being born unto the house of Berthold ; on my word, if I had been a married man myself, I could not have been more vexed at the interesting event.

My Aunt's first command was, that I should put on my hat and run over to France, and fetch Alfred. I preferred trusting to the post. Letter after letter did I myself carry to the Berlin wool shop, and slip into the box, begging him, if he had any respect for the life of the mother of his future family, to return at once, and all should be forgiven.

"The Doctor says," I wrote, "that if her mind is not perfectly at rest, he will not answer for the consequences."

What did *he* care about consequences ? Beyond one line, stating that he should shortly be in London—which was a falsehood, and not worth the postage he paid on it—I never heard from him.

I had more than half a mind to visit the Madam and ask her what she thought about the business, but I

couldn't help having some faith in the vagabond, and besides—where would my three hundred pounds have been?

Poor little wife! she kept her bed, and tried to die very quietly, telling everybody who asked after her health that she was "much better," though her tearful eyes were red, and her cheeks white.

We were all as attentive as we could be. I always took my boots off before I went up stairs. Gallons and gallons of capital mutton broth were made for her, but my dear Uncle had to eat them for his luncheon, until, positively, he grew so sick of broth, he had to entreat the Doctor to change his patient's diet to beef tea.

The boiled fowls she refused to touch, the sweet-breads she wouldn't even look at, made the housekeeping very heavy, and my dear Aunt very fat and dainty.

All the pleasures of that once happy home ceased from the moment she withdrew from us and took to her bedroom. I was forced to keep up my heart with half prices to the theatres, but alas! when, late at night, I returned home and gazed up at the illuminated window of that sad room, with a round dot of light from the rushlight shade centered on the blind, as if a magic lantern were being exhibited—then the supper I had paid for so recklessly, turned to lead and became expenditure without profit.

One day I was walking down Regent Street, very heart-broken and disturbed (even my cigar wouldn't burn properly), when a gentleman, evidently a foreigner, stopped me and claimed my acquaintance, in imperfect English, but lifting his hat with consummate grace.

I was so overcome I tried to hide my cigar, for it

was rather early in the day for a man to be seen puffing at his cuba.

He was a very fine man, with a chest like an eighteen-gallon cask, and a better beard than some horses tails.

I don't know which were the more elegant, his manners or his costume. It was an honour to be seen talking to him. "Really I think you are mistaken," I said, regretting my shirt was so dirty.

"Oh, yes! we had met in Italy. And how was his friend Mr. Berthold and his Italian lady."

How the dickens, I thought to myself, does he know that Alfred is married. I concluded that he must be a very intimate acquaintance to be entrusted with that great secret. Then I told him that Alfred was in Boulogne.

"Ah! how extraordinary! he, too, was going to Boulogne—perhaps I would be so obliging as to favour him with the address of his friend Mr. Berthold."

Certainly, very happy indeed. I pulled out a card and scribbled on the back of it, "*Hotel des deux cents Ambassadeurs.*"

As it was a good opportunity for sending a message, I begged this magnificent swell to tell Alfred that Mrs. Berthold was in a highly dangerous state, and that his presence was urgently required.

It was a treat to see the stranger bow and scrape as we parted. I, for the sake of old England, tried to do it, but failed miserably, my brim having lost its spring, and I backing against an old gentleman, who called me a monkey, and hinted I was trying after his watch.

* * * * *

There are some men who have the lawyer's art of doing a great deal of evil without allowing their peace and self-content to be at all disturbed. I do not think I could tell my clerk to sweep off the furniture of some unfortunate struggling debtor, and then go home to dinner and enjoy my meal. Neither do I think I could live happily at Boulogne, and benefit from the change of air, when I knew that my wife was sinking under my neglect—starving for a few crumbs of love.

But Alfred's belief was, that so long as he paid the bills of his wife's housekeeping no other claim ought to be made against him. He prided himself that he had never spoken a brutal word to her, like many hundred husbands he could mention.

"*I have made a great mistake, and have only myself to blame,*" he would assure himself. "*She* has not made a bad speculation out of it, and has no right, that I can think of, to grumble at her good fortune. I was mad, tipsy with the sunshine of Italy, and acted like a fool. Now my senses have returned, and I repent at leisure. She may live after her own fancy, and I shall follow mine."

Yet this man had raved and groaned to me about his adored Rosa Maria, and flung himself at her feet imploring her to be his wife. He had bribed me to add my entreaties to his, and persuaded her to believe his love was earnest and enduring. Right honestly had I earned my bribe.

But how did his account stand?

The truth is simply this: your sentimentalist is a humbug of the most dangerous description; for he first humbugs himself, and looks so much like truth that I

will defy Milor Nick himself to find him out, until the excitement has passed, and his superior organization requires a fresh stimulant.

With plenty of money, and nothing to do but spend it, time flies as quickly as sleeping. Alfred lived in the best rooms at the best hotel, with a balcony before the windows, over which he could loll, and watch the life of the harbour; a capital place for sipping coffee in the cool of the evening; the odour of the mignonette mixing with the aroma of the cigar. Rooms as elegantly furnished as those in the house at home.

The cook at the "Hotel des deux cents Ambassadeurs" was a man of fame. He had invented a new dish of marvellous delicacy, "Frogs *sautées* à la Tagliani." The rich gentleman in No. 12 had but to think he was hungry, and this genius turned up his wristbands and worked at his compounds.

Alfred had made many friends during his stay. The fashionable rips, who were waiting for the statute of limitations to welcome them back to their native land, were his companions. They liked to know a man who gave private dinners at the "Hotel des deux cents Ambassadeurs."

All pleasant jovial fellows, fond of good eating and drinking, and great favourites with everybody but their creditors. Men rather red about the nose, and subject to cutaneous eruptions—"drops of brandy," as, among themselves, they wittily termed their grog blossoms.

Men full of anecdote—first-rate company—who could drink neat brandy like sherry, and tell you twenty different adventures either about the lovely ladies of the aristocracy who had fallen in love with them; or

of the jolly time when they kept the Carnterford fox hounds; or of their night larks and street fights; or of the actresses who adored them.

These were the men who, when the cold November winds blow back to England the sea-side visitors, stand on the quay, and watch with envious eyes the steamer start for Dover, waving their hands to the pretty passengers they have flirted with, and trying to make out they remain behind of their own free will, by bawling out, "If the weather doesn't soon change, I shall leave next week."

'Ware Sloman, my friends; three cheers for the Queen, my boys, but down with her Bench!

These gay men held peculiar theories about woman, and her master; Eastern-Asiatic notions concerning the treatment best fitted to subdue the impertinent sex. They were outspoken gentlemen, and free of tongue and imagery, "who would stand no d——d stuff," they said.

If their wives were saucy, or jealous, or grumbled for a little of the money they were squandering, they knew medicines that never failed in quieting the rebellious jades. Compared to them Alfred was a mild, tender, attentive husband. As they talked and boasted, he felt disgusted with their brutality, and thought how fortunate the unfortunate Rosa was to have, as legal owner, such a humane gentleman as he was.

"It is no use their trying it on with me," cried Captain Calcraft, speaking of women as a class, and shaking his fist with considerable dignity, "I soon knock all the blessed nonsense out of them."

"Lock them up for a week or two, and cut off the

food," shouted the witty Dolly Rush, "that'll bring 'em to their senses."

"I collar the money and bolt," said Teddy Fitz-Manning, one of the pleasantest men in the world. "As for tears and that sort of thing, if they try that game on with me, why I let 'em cry till they're dry."

Alfred thought to himself what would have become of Rosa if she had fallen to the lot of either of these philosophers. He neither struck, starved, nor stinted his wife. How, then, was it possible for him to be a bad husband?

It was a very gay season at Boulogne, the weather so hot that claret every half-hour was a necessity, and the town so crowded that the rents were as high as the thermometer. Balls or concerts every night, and picnics every day, made it excessively jolly.

Alfred was soon acquainted with the best people in the place. They said he was such a dear man, such a good creature, so very gentlemanly, and so very well off. During bathing-time, when he sauntered about the beach, all the pretty girls were *so* glad to see him that sometimes he had half-a-dozen laughing about him with their long wet hair hanging down their backs, and their faces bright, rosy, and pert from the dip in the sea.

At Boulogne flirting is a favourite pastime. The pretty girls fell in love with the charms hanging to Alfred's watch-chain, and begged for this dear little steam-engine, or that sweet little frying-pan. Some scolded him very encouragingly for not having called, and threatened very mildly to be out next time he called. Mammás ran up to him and asked him to

luncheon. Some of the fair ones proposed walks along the shore hunting for shells, others suggested donkey rides.

In fact, Alfred was reaping all the advantages of being a single man, whilst, in justice to him, I must add, he was doing his utmost to become one.

Do you think the mammas, if they had known that Rosa's certificate was genuine, would have given such handsome orders to "open more bitter ale" or run up the housekeeping by sending out for *pâtés de veau* and pressed turkey. Jim the son, and Joe the cousin, were not allowed to touch these dainties; they were all for Mr. Berthold; and when he left they were locked up again, in case any other rich bachelor should come to luncheon.

Neither, had the truth been known, would the darling Emma have thought Mr. Alfred witty, nor the adorable Peggy have considered him "so aristocratic" and called his whiskers "dears."

One afternoon, whilst Alfred was lazying through that part of the day when luncheon is over and the promenade not yet commenced; whilst it is too hot to do anything but do nothing; Theodore, the waiter, entered with a card, and stated that a gentleman was waiting below.

"I do not know any Ernest de Vargoot," muttered Alfred, glancing at the name. "Say I'm out. What is he like?"

The only description Theodore had time to give was that the Monsieur had a beautiful beard, for when next Alfred raised his eyes he beheld a nobly built man, in a ten-guinea waistcoat, bowing and smiling at the door.

It was a beard! It sprouted from close under his eyes and fell over his shirt front a black glossy compact mass, that he might have twisted round and fastened up, as ladies do their back hair, with a comb.

The reception Alfred gave him was cold and formal, but far from being awed, the stranger—a hard lump of self-assurance—grinned and gesticulated with great affability, and presently introduced himself as *my* most intimate friend.

The fellow spoke of me affectionately as *ce cher Monsieur Eyles*, and said I was *spirituel* and *très aimable*, and a heap of other falsehoods. He had, he said, parted from me in London only three hours since. Such, he remarked, were the miracles of steam. He suggested that Alfred would be glad to hear I was well and gay.

He had the audacity to add, that it was to oblige *me* that he came to Boulogne, or usually he preferred the Calais route. But the name of Mrs. Berthold had been mentioned, and *place aux dames*. The health of that lady was failing, alas! it was in danger. It was impossible for him to withstand my pathetic appeal to call upon the heart-broken husband and warn him of his “impending misfortune.”

Deuce take the man! In his heart, Alfred, no doubt, cursed me bountifully for betraying his secret, and swore I might whistle for my three hundred.

But to Monsieur Ernest he was more guarded in his manners; and, at parting, they exchanged sentiments of the most sincere friendship and mutual admiration. “I trust you do not leave Boulogne for a few days,” asked Alfred, though he would have given fifty pounds to send the man off by the next train.

The reply was prefaced by a shrug and a smile—perhaps a *leetle* too affected for so large a man: “I am a creature of impulses,” said the ape; “it is as my fancy leads me—I may depart to-night, perhaps not for twenty years! It is like that.”

Unfortunate young man! His secret was known. It was very awkward. If this foreigner should sprinkle about Boulogne the news that Alfred Berthold was married, what the deuce could he say or do in his defence? The mammas would murder him.

The only escape he could calculate upon was that the good-natured world would certainly translate the word “wife,” into such a sense that Rosa alone would suffer by the definition.

This thought was not only a consolation, but it struck him as full of drollery.

The new friend became, from the unflagging way in which he persecuted Alfred with his intimacy, an overwhelming bore. Wherever he went, there followed this big beard, almost as if it tracked him. At table-d’hôtes Monsieur Ernest occupied the next chair; at public balls, he was the vis-à-vis; even in the water whilst bathing—everywhere, but in his bed-room, was Alfred pestered by this over-friendly individual.

His inquiries after Madame Berthold’s health were made so publicly, that a rumour spread among the congregated mammas that the old lady in London was dying, and in that case how wealthy her son would be!

Jessica was ordered to wear her hair as on the day when Mr. Berthold praised her so much; Julia was told to take her best frock into every day use.

Whenever the young ladies met Alfred, the interest

they took in his mother's health overcame their innate timidity, and they would run after him to ask very prettily if he had received any good news of her from home.

It was excessively annoying to Alfred that he could not make this bearded tormentor understand that he wished to pass in Boulogne for a single man. On more than one occasion, when a dozen men were smoking and drinking at his rooms, the Monsieur asked him very pointedly if he had "heard from his wife;" and from the impertinent manner in which some of the guests inquired whether the lady in question was dark or fair, thin or plump, short or tall, it was evident that they did not consider the lady entitled to a married woman's respect.

The nuisance became unbearable; Alfred determined to get rid of the man by quarrelling with him.

An opportunity soon occurred. After a very long dinner and a very hard evening, Alfred and his friend sallied forth in the small hours of the morning to play at billiards. There are rooms at some of the hotels which never close, unless it is to oblige the white-washers, or for the carpet to be swept.

The wine-soaked gang were soon knocking the balls about. Presently in came Monsieur Ernest de Vargoot, and many minutes had not passed before solicitous and loud inquiries were made about Mrs. Berthold's health.

"Confound you!" cried Alfred full of wine, and consequently plucky; "you seem to take more interest in my wife than I do myself."

The fellows left off playing to laugh. The answer

was, "I believe I do;" said in a cold impudent manner, which caused another shout.

"Then, for the future," rejoined Alfred, "attend to your own private affairs, and leave mine alone, or——"

Monsieur Ernest smiled and asked, "Or—what?"

This fired my brave Londoner. "Or I'll knock your head off!" he added, looking savage and determined.

Some of Alfred's companions, seeing that the conversation had taken a tragic turn, counselled him to "chuck the fellow out of window," and to "pull his nose." But my friend, turning to the billiard-table, paid no heed to their advice, and indeed the affair would have dropped altogether had it not been for the Frenchman's obstinacy.

He retired to a side-table, and, whilst smoking his cigarette, conversed, purposely, in broken English with a friend who had accompanied him on this expedition—one Lieutenant Pewpew, an officer stationed in the town.

After abusing England, its climate, and its inhabitants, Monsieur Ernest, in a bold, intentional voice, assured the Lieutenant that "ce Berthold" was a rank coward, with no grandeur of soul, and devoid of any elevated sense of honour.

Such words, heard by all in the room, required explanation. "What is that you said about me?" Alfred inquired, livid with rage.

Pointing to the Lieutenant, the Frenchman answered, "I was addressing my friend—not you, sir;" and without taking any further notice of the interruption, resumed the conversation by adding—"He has deserted his wife, a charming creature."

I shall not mention the dialogue which followed, because the language became coarse.

Eventually, Alfred completely lost his self-command, and, on being contemptuously called a "pillule," he struck the foreigner; and, having entrusted the affair to the delicate care of Captain Calcraft, partook of more brandy-and-water—hot—and was escorted home in triumph by his companions.

He awoke late in the afternoon with a confused idea that he had been guilty of some stupidity in the early morning. He laid in bed trying hard to recall the exact circumstances of his adventure, when the Captain, a thorough man of business, looked in for breakfast, and most kindly revealed to him the past.

Everything had been arranged very satisfactorily, Pistols at daybreak, on the heights, a capital place, with a little wine shop close at hand, in case of anything—you know.

He had no heart to stir out that day, or even show himself on his balcony to the beautiful eyes that constantly looked up at his window. Julia and Peggy were asking everywhere if Mr. Berthold was indisposed? If they had seen him as he sat at his table writing his long letters, they would have concluded that the pale-faced man was sick to death's door. He was in pain too, or why every now and then, did the tears start to his eyes, and his body shake as if with the ague?

So it happened that, when I reached Boulogne by the seven o'clock boat, I found him at home. I had left London at great personal inconvenience, thinking that nobody was so fitted as a tried friend to carry

the glad tidings of his son's birth and the mother's safety.

It was my intention, if he seemed pleased with the tidings, to use all my influence to coax him back to England. I shall never forget the effect my news had upon him. He fell back in his chair, and drew up his limbs as if trying to escape from my words.

I concluded he was pained beyond endurance to find another life had been added as a testimony to his marriage; but, to do him justice, he was suffering from the repentance that comes too late, experiencing the grief that is beyond cure.

When he entreated me to leave him alone that evening, I, mistaking his conduct, was not sorry to take him at his word.

I must have been in bed at least three hours—and it struck midnight as I returned to the hotel—when a knocking came to my door. I opened it, and found Alfred.

But half awake, I could still judge from his troubled face that he had not been sitting up so late from choice or pleasure.

"I have been writing to my mother," he said, "telling her all about my marriage, and begging her to forgive me and that poor woman, for the child's sake. I have enclosed a letter for dear Rosa. I think my mother had better give it to her. If you do not see me in the morning, you had better start by the eleven o'clock boat. Good night, and God bless you!"

I have many a time since rejoiced that the last words Alfred ever spoke to me had a blessing in them.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALL ACCOUNTS ARE SETTLED.

You and I, my dear brethren, are, I am sure, opposed on moral grounds to the diabolical and always unsatisfactory practice of duelling.

I am a man of peace, especially when attacked by any one beyond my strength of resistance.

My duels must take place in the police court, where the fight is fought with the deadly summons, and your man is knocked over by a fine, without any bones being broken. I never did yet receive a challenge, and if ever I do, I hereby solemnly promise to rush to Mr. Bingham and—tell. They may call me coward, or anything they like, and post me at the Whittington Club if they choose; but I am not going to allow any man to take aim at my stomach, to oblige all the codes of honour ever framed and glazed.

Besides, I should appeal for support to progress men, and be the better able to talk of civilization and the nineteenth century, from not having a bullet hole in my lungs.

I hold that fight by pistol can never be a fair settlement of a dispute, for this reason: Suppose it please General Green to consider I have very grossly insulted him, and he is satisfied that nothing will remove the stain from his honour but that highly-cleansing, capital washing-mixture—blood. He generously allows me the choice of weapons. What use is that, to me? I know about as much of pistols as any delicious innocent sucking-pig. He could shoot a match with William Tell.

"Very well," says General Green, "make it swords." That is no benefit to me, for, hang it! I cannot even carve a chicken, much less pink a man; whilst he would run me through as easily as filing a bill.

No! I say it is quite as cowardly for an experienced fencer and sure shot, to insist upon a duel as it is for a harmless man of peace to refuse the challenge.

Let us have fair play, and if mortal combat be a necessity, let some weapon be chosen with which both men are equally inexpert. Bows and arrows, for instance.

The fact of Alfred having struck his enemy has, in my judgment, nothing to do with the case, because the man had evidently tried his utmost to earn this blow, and having got it what more could he want?

Of course, a blow is a nasty thing, and, indeed, according to the last quotations from the price list of the legal market, assaults are firm at five pounds, or fourteen days at the tread-wheel.

Do you think that pat on the head—from a drunken man's hand too—had done him ten shillings' worth of damage? Wouldn't he have liked to take three thousand such pats at five shillings each? Was there any proof that his honour had been stained or spotted? Evidence was not even tendered that he had any honour at all. He might have been a returned convict on his travels, preserving the strictest incognito, or the proprietor of a gambling den, or a waiter at a night-house recovering from late hours with sea-side air. All these men talk of honour. There was good possibility for this in such a city of refuge as Boulogne.

What folly, then, for Alfred to risk decent life

against such vagabond existence! Think of the bone of his bone in the house at home, who will weep over the shattered arm; think of the mother who bore that hopeful son wringing her hands over the mangled flesh of her flesh.

No! my good brethren, duelling is but a fancy term for murder; it is but assassination varnished up and made fashionable; the only throat-cutting left to gentlemen who object to the disgrace of a Newgate trial, but it springs from the same evil impulses and brutal desires—vengeance and fury.

Settle your drunken disputes before Mr. Bingham, and let him whip you with five-pound penalties; he is judge enough for you; but beware of hurrying your enemy before that tribunal where there is no appeal against verdicts, and judgment is only deferred until that sure constable, Death, shall bring up his prisoner for sentence to be passed.

Nothing transforms an unscrupulous ruffian into a delicate-minded creature, until he becomes a fine connoisseurs of gentlemanly behaviour, so effectively as making him a "second" in a duel. Unworthy Captain Calcraft, from the moment he so kindly consented to act in the business for Alfred, became a Chevalier without fear or reproach.

He was an old hand at these heroic combats, and understood perfectly the proper deportment. There was a broken arm somewhere in the North which was a useful member before he took aim at it.

He was especially anxious that Alfred should, for old England's sake, behave with pluck in this little affair with a foreigner. For fear his man should be late on

the field, he, at great personal inconvenience, remained for the night at Alfred's hotel, sipping a few bottles of claret and smoking eighteen cigars. The advice he gave to his man was valuable, and the result of vast experience. He was to hold his pistol thus, so as to protect the chest with the arm; he was to stand thus, so as to present his side to the enemy; he was to take aim in such a manner, so as to knock the fellow over.

His tender care for his friend was very affecting. He made his man go to bed for a few hours, and when he awoke prepared for him with his own hands the cup of drink—a mixture of coffee, eggs, and brandy—which was to make his wrist steady and his heart brave.

Is it to be wondered at that, under such tender guidance, Alfred should have been the first to reach the fatal ground?

“It will let the Frenchman see we are not afraid of him,” said the Captain, joyfully.

But they had not to wait long. Men bent on evil are great sticklers for punctuality. If you have an appointment to lend a friend ten pounds, keeping him waiting for a few hours does not so much signify; but if you are due at a man-shooting match, a minute behind time is called most indelicate behaviour.

The pacing over the ground, the loading of pistols, took place whilst Alfred was wondering if he should ever kiss his child. How he re-loved Rosa during those few minutes! Should Heaven be merciful to him, should he escape this danger, how he would strive to make her forget he had been cruel! The thought of dying without confessing to her his repentance, without hearing her say she forgave him, pressed all courage

from his spirit, so that, but for the flush the brandy had given to his cheek, he would have seemed a pale-faced coward.

He was told to take off his coat and comforter, and made to button up close to the neck, to conceal everything that might direct the Frenchman's fire; he was led forth by the Captain, who whispered earnestly his last injunctions about taking aim, and he was placed opposite his foe, but not the Monsieur Ernest of the day before, but some one with the head of an ancient Roman warrior, with short curling hair and beard, some one at whose features he had to stare before he could remember where he had seen them before; who had worked hard with the razor, and now appeared with his old face, to take vengeance on the Englishman who had dared to stand between him and his passion for Rosa Maria.

There could be no doubt about that broad-chested fellow with the classic head, it was the Capitano Paolo, the Brigand rogue.

He stood smiling with disdain on his rival, as if he had reckoned on this *coup de théâtre*, and had arranged how he would act the scene.

"I shall not fight that scoundrel!" said Alfred, calmly, handing his pistol back to Captain Calcraft. "He is a robber, a murderer, anything you like to call him. With his beard on, I did not recognise the rogue. The police shall fight with him, not I."

This would have ended the affair very pleasantly, but Lieutenant Pewpew objected to such a termination. "Your expressions," observed that officer, "are harsh, without being argumentative, and certainly unjustifiable."

"Upon my word, my dear fellow," suggested Captain Calcraft, "I don't see how you can get out of it. How can you prove your words? Better wing him first, and hang him afterwards."

"You shall not disguise your cowardice with slander," roared the vagabond ten paces off. "Let me know when your courage has sufficiently returned."

The proprietor of the little wine shop hard by heard the reports of two pistols as he was undoing the fastenings of his windows, and whilst the simple man stood wondering what sportsman could be out shooting so early, a red-faced Englishman, half wild with excitement, rushed up and snatched from his hands the shutter he had just taken down, and shortly the wood was stained with the blood of a man who, with his life fast fading away, came to beg a death-bed at the dwelling.

The bleeding man's last words were, "God grant she may forgive me!"

* * * * *

I had done as I had been bidden. I waited at the hotel until the eleven o'clock boat was on the point of starting, and then, Alfred not returning, I started for London.

But, mercy on me! I should not have enjoyed the passage so thoroughly as I did, if I had known what, but a few hours since, had happened to that unfortunate young man. I shouldn't, for instance, have had that brandy and water, and smoked those cigars with the man at the wheel, neither should I have borrowed the captain's telescope to look at ships I never saw after all, or been altogether so well pleased with myself and the

world. I wonder what I should have done? Dear dear! I pray I shall never be put to the test.

The letter was duly delivered at the great house. The Madam was at home, but being forewarned of the purport of her son's communication, I declined the honour of an interview, and preferred to hurry on to the home where the poor unsuspecting mother lay with her child on her bosom, talking to it in nursery language, and promising that father should soon return.

Unfortunate woman! why should the great happiness of that dear new life be destroyed by the agony of that dear life departed? How was it that she, though pure and unoffending, was never to be completely joyful? Why should rips and rogues laugh and be merry, and yet this gentle being not even have peace enough in her soul to warrant a smile?

Wait a little, patient wife! the reward is not far distant, the day of reckoning will come; there shall be laughing and clapping of hands, and such kissing of cheeks.

Has not that dear child been sent you in mercy? His little shoulders—though so weak and soft, the touch is too heavy for their strength—will help you bear the weight of your affliction. You will not weep so bitterly when his little arms are about your neck.

The first suspicion I had of something dreadful having occurred to the Berthold family was when the Madam's servant came, late in the evening, to request I would wait upon his mistress.

The man could give me no positive information as to the reason of my being sent for. His lady had passed the entire day in her own room. The maid had seen

her kneeling by the bed-side, with a letter crumpled up in her hands and held to her eyes like a handkerchief. The coachman had been sent to "put off" friends invited to dinner. The whole household was gloomy and disturbed, but wherefore none as yet knew.

I dreaded my interview, but I went. I concluded that the old lady's grief arose from the disappointment of her son's unequal marriage; and I tell you plainly, I was prepared, if she had commenced to abuse the good little wife, to stand up boldly in her defence, however severe might be the consequences to my well-being.

But the moment I beheld the old lady, I understood at once that some stronger reason than frustrated vanity must have caused her altered appearance.

The plump, handsome face was now withered; and, as I entered, the features—most likely because the sight of her son's companion awakened her memories—began to quiver with quickened grief.

Had she been angry, she would have attempted to be dignified, and have received me with chilling haughtiness; but she sat in her chair with bent back, and clutching at the sides, as if she wished to rise at my entrance, but had not the strength.

She did not even try to replace the straight grey hair that was hanging over her forehead.

It shocked me painfully to see this woman, whom I had always known so prim and stately, now broken down and helpless.

I read the letter—it explained everything.

It consoled her to have some one near her who had well and faithfully loved her dead son, and who had a

right to share her sorrow. Our grief soon made us intimate.

The business to be done had to be talked over. Painful as the consultation must have been, yet, by varying her thoughts, it kept her mind alive. It is that monotony of undisturbed grief that kills.

I was to start for Boulogne. She would leave everything to me. I was to claim the mangled form lying in the back room at the French wine-shop, and bring it back to England, to be buried next the grave of his "dear father," in the country churchyard, where she, in her turn, should soon seek for rest.

Not a word was to be spoken to the wife—not a word for the present. When the child was older, and more and more beloved, and she, poor unsuspecting mother, stronger and more anxious to live for that infant's sake, then the secret should be carefully divulged by hints and slips of the tongue.

Before leaving I tried my utmost to interest the old lady in her widowed daughter's behalf; but I had all the talking to myself, for she listened, but never answered me. I exhausted my arguments, and spoke until not a thought was left, repeating and repeating my entreaties, still no hopeful promise could I obtain.

Then I began to tell her of the little orphan child, of its resemblance to her lost son, its pretty ways, and indeed I introduced some twenty anecdotes of the infant's precocious talent, which my Aunt Ruth had related to me.

But the stubborn old lady, though the desire to embrace her grandchild was strong upon her, still held her tongue.

As I rose to depart, she seemed to relent a little—"My son," she said, "acted very imprudently in keeping his marriage a secret; and the sooner the truth is known, the better it will be for his widow's character, and my dear lost boy's memory."

My heart was lighter after this. What a blessing that child was born. What would Rosa have done without that small baby of hers to fight her battles for her.

For five hundred pounds I would never again undergo what I endured on that melancholy journey to and from Boulogne. What with aiding justice, and the family lawyer, who accompanied me to hunt after the culprit, who, before the first police officer had determined what to do, was miles away and safe; what with answering the ten thousand questions that everybody had ready for me the moment I appeared in sight; and, above all, what with the solemn and depressing duty of escorting poor Alfred's remains to London, I was, the journey over, completely worn out and sick.

At Boulogne I was mistaken for an undertaker; in England I was suspected of travelling with a coffin for the purpose of smuggling French goods into the country.

Thank God; we are now all reconciled. The Madam, whilst I was away, called upon the widow, and soon loved the pretty gentle creature—indeed, how could she help doing so. On my return, I found the stately Mrs. Berthold at St. John's Wood, superintending the management of the baby, much to my aunt's annoyance, who wanted me to tell her "what a woman, who had all her life ridden in her carriage, could know about the rearing of infants."

We allowed Rosa to guess at the reason of Alfred's long absence, dribbling out our news slowly and reluctantly; in fact, dividing the strong faggot of grief into many little twigs that would not deal too severe a blow, until it was only necessary to inform her not that he was dead, but how he died.

That was my secret. Even the Madam never knew the name of the fellow who killed her son.

As for revealing it to Rosa, I might as well have murdered the poor creature. She would have accused herself with being the cause of her dear Alfred's death, and not even her infant's love would have reconciled her to life.

And now notice how much sorrow and evil a little honest manly courage will ward off.

The dead man need not have died, but might instead have lived to hear his child pray, "God bless dear father."

He might have seen the wife he thought his shame coaxed, petted, and greatly cared for by that stern majestic mother, the fear of whose anger made him forget he was a husband.

That sorrowful face with the golden hair and blue eyes was, when he had no ears to hear, praised sufficiently even to have quieted his timid, silly scruples.

Unfortunate dead man! he had done one foolish action, and, instead of struggling, brain and heart, to turn it into a wise one, he followed up his folly with follies, until it was almost better he should die.

I may as well add, that I never touched those three hundred pounds; but, I ought not to grumble, for I have a good berth in the Admiralty, as under-secretary

to the Dry-rot department; and though I don't understand much about ships, rigging, or navigation generally, yet I know to a minute when my salary is due, and I never give the nation longer credit than I can help.

THOMAS EYLE,
HISTORICAL PAINTER,
AND
GOVERNMENT CLERK.

THE END.

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